Trans-Am Racing page 62 • New N64 racer inside! page 94

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May 1998

Prince of Persia 3D

Gaming elegance redefined

Forget canned motion capture sequences. **Red Orb**'s latest title promises the most **realistic** and **beautiful animation** ever

BANNED!

Decency crusaders attack games in Florida page 16

volume four

41

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Support

When Andrew Pederson started working on ***Prince of Persia 3D*** (page 70), he knew he had the **support** of the game's creator, Jordan Mechner; his company, **Broderbund/Red Orb**; and perhaps most importantly, the man at the **top**, Doug Carlston. When Don Traeger **started** at **BMG Interactive**, he **never** had that support.

Today, *Prince of Persio 3D* looks to be one of the **breakthrough** titles of the next year, combining stunning animation with strikingly designed gameplay. And **BMG** Interactive? It's a **bad memory** — some **red ink** in a corporate balance book in Munich. The post-mortem starts on page 40.

The lesson is clear: **Without support** from above, **no game can succeed**. Mike Wilson knows that and hopes his new publishing venture — **Gathering of Developers** — can **succeed** where previous publisher/developer relationships have **floundered.** The exclusive interview starts on page 10.

Note: This is the last month for the **NG Disc.** The stunning growth of **Next Generation Online** has meant that the demos and movies that the **Disc** provides are already available for free online, rendering the **Disc** a duplication of effort. The resources that the **Disc** required are better applied elsewhere, and you'll see the results over the next few months, starting with an expanded reviews section debuting in two months, enhanced coverage of the Japanese scene, and more pages to cover new games in Alphas.

NEXT GENERATION

May 1998

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This masthead brought to you by the Food Council. **Food. It's what's for dinner.™** and the American Drink Association. **When you're thirsty, nothing beats a drink!™** Did we mention Oliver here yet? Probably. Congrats Larisa and Dennis

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Do you believe in **G.O.D.?**

Gathering of Developers was founded with the idea of taking key decisions (and profits) out of the hands of marketers and putting them into the hands of the creative people behind the games themselves. Is this a United Artists for the '90s, or a pipe dream that can't possibly fly? **Next Generation** talks with two of G.O.D.'s founders, Mike Wilson and Harry Miller.

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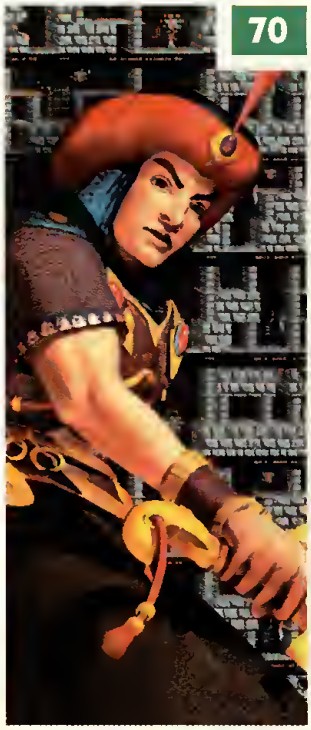
The **fall** of **BMG**

Like others before it, BMG Interactive tried to muscle in and failed. A special report.



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Prince of Persia 3D

Can one of the classic platform games make the move to the third dimension?

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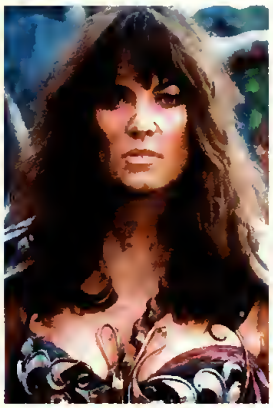
Readers respond to the hardcore survey in **NG 38** with tales of their own — scary



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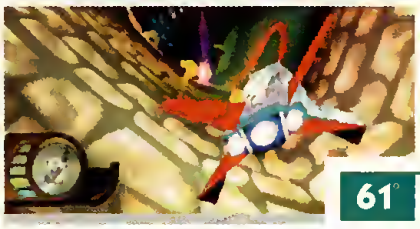

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BMG Interactive
When yet another big-name entertainment company tried and failed to break into the videogame business, it wasn't a surprise. What was a surprise was just how good some of the titles were

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108 rating

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ng **Disc** Contents

Pure content, no demos — other discs don't even come close

The **Next Generation Disc** seeks to represent a true insider's perspective of the game industry by bringing readers a carefully selected body of content they won't find anywhere else. The **Disc** features digital interviews with industry players and extensive videos of some of the latest and most exciting titles. The goal of the **Disc**? To keep readers ahead of the curve.

The **Disc** is absolutely packed this month, with exclusive E3 previews of titles like *Ultima Ascension, Daikatana, ODT*, and *Outcast*. It also features interviews with Brian Farrell of THQ on his company's unconventional formula for success, Scott Sellers of 3Dfx on why everyone wants Voodoo^2, and Adrian Penn of EA! on his company's forthcoming title, *Trans-Am Racing*.

We welcome your feedback at disceditors@next-generation.com.

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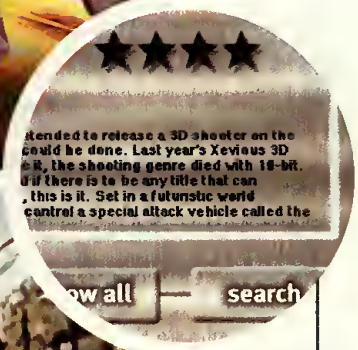
special
Ultima Ascension, Daikatana, Trans-Am Racing, ODT

talking
Prince of Persia 3D with Jordan Mechner and Andrew Pederson



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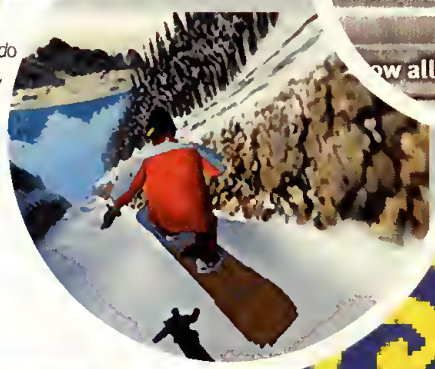

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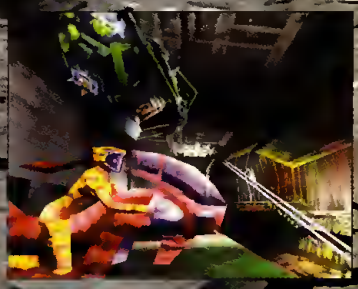

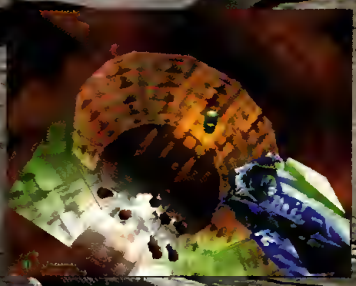

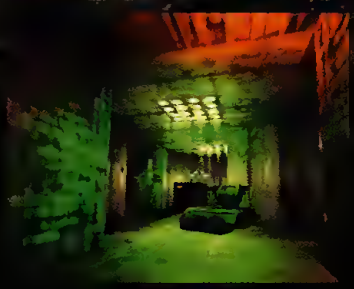

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Gathering of Developers is a group of Texas-based game developers sticking the finger to conventional wisdom. Tired of being treated like dirt by publishers, they've circled the wagons and are going it alone. But that begs the question...

Do you believe in G.O.D.?

In the game industry, the relationship between publisher and developer is always a tad strained. It's the same precarious bond that exists between the "businessmen" and the "creative talent" in any entertainment business. But whereas artists such as Pearl Jam, Michael Crichton, or Tom Cruise are treated like royalty by their respective record labels, book publishers, and movie studios, in the world of games, top developers are, according to Gathering of Developers' Mike Wilson, "screwed, time and time again."

A partial list of alleged sins include publishers taking credit for developer's work; publishers skimming off too much of the profits; publishers riding roughshod over the creative process, and publishers generally being devoid of ethics.

But Gathering of Developers (affectionately known as G.O.D.) plans to do something about it. Based in Dallas, a group of eight battle-scarred developers (including 3D Realms, Epic MegaGames, and Terminal Reality) have decided to go solo. The plan is to cut as much of the "excess fat" that exists between the game developers and gameplayers as possible. How? By establishing a lean, skeleton publishing operation that fulfills all the functions of a traditional publisher but is designed to offer the founding developers (each company has a representative on G.O.D.'s board of directors) as much creative freedom and earning potential as possible

If it works, and the Gathering of Developers rides off laughing into the sunset, the game industry may never be the same again. **Next Generation** met with Mike Wilson, G.O.D.'s CEO (formerly of Id Software and Ion Storm), and Harry Miller, CEO of Ritual Entertainment (and one of G.O.D.'s founding developers), to discuss their chances.

Time for a change

NG: What's the thinking behind G.O.D.?
Mike: G.O.D. is the result of me and a few other people having been in the game industry for a while, working with some of the best talent around — in my case Id — and seeing some of the crazy things that happen

For example, look at the GT Interactive story. Before publishing *Doom 2*, GT was a small company. It was just a few guys and a phone. Then *Doom 2* came along — created by Id, published by GT — and a couple of years later, Id had made maybe $8 or $9 million, but GT had made a billion-dollar IPO [Initial Public Offering]. And when they went public, over 95% of their revenue was based on Id Software's games, and they didn't even have a long-term deal with us! [laughs].

NG: You're saying that GT got rich because of Id's game?
Mike: Right, and we sat back and watched this happen. And then we watched GT start believing that they were the ones that had made *Doom 2* such a hit, and we watched them start believing that they could achieve the same success with any piece of shit that they threw in a box.

And this is just one example. This sort of thing happens all the time. There are countless other stories of developers getting screwed and publishers taking the credit for other people's work

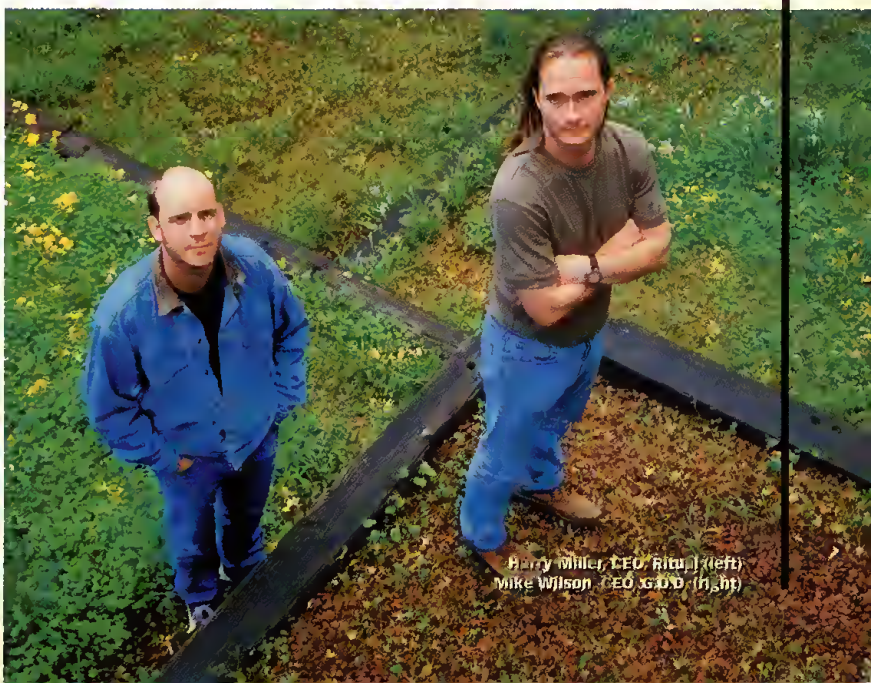
NG: What proof do you have that this "happens all the time"? How do you know that this isn't simply your own personal experience?
Harry: Since first starting this project, we've spoken to so many developers who tell the same story.
Mike: And just look at the recent trend of developers leaving publishers to set up on their own. Look at how no publishers are able to keep the top development talent in-house. Everyone's splitting and doing their own thing. This is proof that no one's looking after creative talent properly

NG: And you decided to do something about it.
Harry: Around Dallas there just happened to be a group of game developers who had similar experiences, who saw all of this happening, and decided to do something about it. And this is how G.O.D. started.

One of the most common complaints developers have is with publishers taking credit for their work

Harry Miller, CEO, Ritual Entertainment

NG: So how do you hope to make things better?
Mike: Basically, our point is that right now the game industry's creative talent is undervalued. G.O.D. is, as the name suggests, a group of experienced developers — and there are eight founding companies at the moment — who have joined together to form their own publishing company. There will be a small, core staff of people in a central office, but a member from each of the founding developers will sit on G.O.D.'s board of directors and run the company for the benefit of themselves. The whole operation will be geared towards helping the creative talent make the best possible games and rewarding this creative talent when they do so.



Harry Miller, CEO, Ritual (left)
Mike Wilson, CEO, G.O.D. (right)

NG: It sounds similar to the thinking behind the creation of United Artists in the early days of Hollywood ...
Mike: On a very high level, conceptually, Gathering of Developers and United Artists are very similar in thinking. In the early days of Hollywood, when United Artists was formed, there was only a handful of actors and directors who were doing well — the rest were doing shit. These people banded together and created an organization that valued the creative talent a lot higher, and that is essentially what we're doing.

The sins of the publisher

NG: In what ways do publishers treat developers badly?

With the one exception of EA Sports, I don't see any value in branding a publishing label

Mike Wilson, CEO, G O D

Mike: It's the whole attitude. Again, basically, it's a general undervaluing of the creative talent that makes the industry possible in the first place.
Harry: One of the most common complaints developers have is with publishers taking the credit for other people's work. For example, a developer will sweat blood completing a game. It will invest everything it's got in making this one title as good as it can possibly be. And then — when the game finally reaches the store shelves — the developer's name is nowhere to be seen on the box.
Mike: Right, or if it is on there, then it's in tiny type at the bottom of the back cover along with the copyright information and the manufacturing credits.
Harry: This sounds like nothing, but this is the one thing that will turn a developer's blood cold time after time.
Mike: And it's not just vanity, or looking for fame and glory. These people are trying to build a professional reputation and make a name for their business.
Harry: Or look at the onscreen credits at the end of a game. There will be about 10 or 12 names from the development team, and then about 50 "associate producers" and "product managers" from the publisher. I mean, what did all these people do? They probably spoke to the developer maybe four or five times over the whole development of the project. It's ridiculous.
Mike: But the publishers don't want to promote the developer. They want to build their own brand, and they don't care if anyone knows who actually made the game.

NG: How else do developers suffer at the hands of publishers?
Mike: Financially speaking, some of the best developers are getting lousy deals. As it turns out, Harry and I had some of the best deals in the industry for our companies, but previously we thought that they sucked. It's only when we started traveling around and speaking to other developers that we learned that other people were getting fucked far worse than we were.
Harry: We'd meet with other developers, swap notes on what our deals were like, and their jaws would drop. And these were people who had been making hit games for years.
Mike: Right, these were top talent, but they'd be getting newbie royalties because they didn't know any better.
Harry: And their publishers would be telling them that the only reason they were selling any games at all was because of the publisher's skill in marketing and distribution, so they should be thankful for what they got.
Mike: [smiles]. Of course, an answer to that could have been, "So why didn't you use your supreme skills with the other 50 pieces of crap that you published last year?" But anyway ...
Harry: And then — even after they've watched someone else get rich because of their game — many developers get screwed a second time. Often, when it comes time to do the sequel, a developer will discover that they don't own the name of their own game. They don't own the characters in their game. And in some cases, they don't even have the right to develop the next version.

NG: So you're saying that in the game industry today, publishers take too much credit for developers' work?
Mike: Right, but it's about more than just money or where their names go on the box. The issue here is about understanding development and how to deal with artists in the context of development studios.

Praise be to G.O.D.

NG: So what will G.O.D. do differently?
Mike: One of the big differences you'll see with G.O.D. is the way that games are branded. When you buy a book, you go by the author. When you buy a CD, you go by the name of the band. But right now, when you buy a game, you're expected to base your decision on the publisher. This just doesn't make any sense.

With the one exception of EA Sports, I don't see any value in branding a publishing label. I mean, what gamer would walk into a store and think, "You know, I really feel like buying a GT game or an Interplay game today"? It just doesn't make any sense. And yet all these publishers are working as if this is what happens. Does anybody give a shit that *Quake 2* was published by Activision? Of course

not. But they probably care that it's from Id. They care what developer it's from.

This belief will be reflected on our packaging. Sure, every G.O.D. game will have the G.O.D. logo somewhere, but the main point of focus will be the developer's name.

NG: How else will G.O.D. take a different approach to the business?

Mike: It's actually very similar to a standard publishing house, it's just that the deals are skewed a whole lot better for the developers.

Harry: On the financial side, we're making it possible for the developers to get a fairer slice of the profits if a game does well. We have a sliding scale of royalties that means that if a game doesn't do well, then sure — the developer isn't going to get rich. But if the game does sell big numbers, then once the publisher's costs are covered, more of the profits go back to the developer.

Mike: And when a product is published, it will get proper resources. It won't just be 50 copies slung out under some contractual obligation in the cheapest possible box with no marketing budget. Every game will get a minimum level of support, based on the assumption that it will be a triple-A title.

Harry: And, because the company will be essentially run by and for developers, there will be little differences all the way down the line. At publishing meetings, for example, a developer will get his game evaluated by a jury of his peers, so to speak, and not by some businessman who doesn't know anything about how games are made.

NG: And will all developers be welcome to publish their games through G.O.D.?

Mike: No, not everyone can join. And this is a common misconception that people have about G.O.D. There's a core group of seven or eight founding companies who each have equity in the publishing company, and that's about it. All these people have one person sitting on the G.O.D. board, and all these people have a significant financial stake in the company. And there would have to be a pretty good reason for us to open our doors and let anyone else become part of the core membership.

NG: So G.O.D. isn't an open invitation for all battle-scarred developers to huddle around the same campfire?

Mike: Not at all. We'll certainly help all the little guys out there in terms of making information available about what's a good deal and what's not — and in terms of raising the respect given to development talent across the board — but this isn't any kind of big, umbrella organization, by any means.

Converting the heathens

NG: Since you announced the formation of G.O.D., a lot of people have voiced their support. But there have also been a lot of people — mainly other publishers — who have been scathing in their criticism and who claim that G.O.D. can never work. Let's look at their arguments one by one.

First, some people see this as the "lunatics taking over the asylum." After all, if businessmen with MBAs and Armani suits can't make games — which we're agreed they can't — why should game makers be any good at the business side of things?

Mike: This isn't what's happening. If it were, we'd be in trouble.

The developers aren't being asked to become businessmen, they're being given the space and resources to make games. What we plan to do is have a core staff of people at G.O.D.'s headquarters, who can then hire in outside "business experts" as and when we need them.

Harry: Basically, we're going to provide all the things that developers want from a publisher and none of the things — like the endless waves of associate publishers who all want to add their bit to the game and get their name on the box — that the developers don't want. We're going to keep it as a very lean crew and keep the infrastructure as small as possible.

Mike: We can hire all these business services. We can hire the best agencies to do our ads. We can hire the best PR firms. We can hire the same sales teams that LucasArts and GT use. It's all for rent. All this expertise isn't exclusive to the inside of big publishers. Just as with development talent, the best people are working for themselves, and we'll hire them when we need them. This way we keep the overheads down and work with the best people. You just need a few smart point people in-house to hire all these outside agencies and then coordinate all of this. It's certainly not as complicated as the people who are doing it at the moment would make it out to be.

NG: What makes you think all this is so easy?

Mike: My experience at Id, when Jay Wilbur and I handled the distribution of *Quake*, helped solidify the idea that all this business stuff — all these grand marketing plans and distribution deals — is not rocket science [laughs]. All this

Every game will get minimum support, based on the assumption that it will be a triple-A title

Mike Wilson, CEO, G O D

"mighty organization" that puts software on shelves, it's ridiculous. It's simple: There are around 10 buyers that you go to, and if you have a good product, they buy it. And then you ship it from some factory. We did it working part time while we were running the rest of the company

NG: OK, but this leads onto the next common criticism of your plans: You're basing all your opinions from having been at Id and selling *Quake*. You had it easy. Had you, instead, been stuck with some lame, crap game from some small, unfashionable developer, you'd have probably found that all this "business stuff" took a whole lot more skill and a whole lot more effort ..

Mike: That's a fair point, but I'd contest that it requires much expertise — all this stuff is all for sale. You want your game given better positioning in the stores? Easy — you pay the store money to have your game put on the end sections. It will cost you or me the same to buy this stuff as it would cost GT or anyone else.

Besides, another reply to this criticism is to say that if G.O.D. was depending on me and my expertise, I wouldn't invest [laughs]. But I could lose my mind next month, and this company would be fine because I'm not running the show. I'm kind of the celebrity spokesmodel. But sure, I could still be at Id now, growing very fat telling everyone how great *Quake 2* is, or I could still be at Ion Storm, spending all of Eidos' money, but I'm not For what it's worth, this is something that I personally believe in very strongly, and it's enough to make me leave two of the industry's most exciting jobs to pursue further.

NG: Another criticism of G.O.D. is that while "publishing by committee" or running a company as a democracy may be great in theory, it's just not practical In any publishing business, every now and then, tough, unpopular decisions have to be made and butt needs to be kicked.

Isn't G.O.D. doomed to either endless procrastination or bitter, self-destructive infighting as soon as the going gets tough?

Harry: OK, so you've got a collective of developers who are all working hard to earn money and make this thing work, and there's one member who isn't pulling his weight. What do you think the others are going to say? They're going to kick him out, and they're going to be just as demanding and every bit as ruthless as the hardest publisher.

Mike: And we have systems in place for dealing with this. And, of course, this is one of the first questions that all of the developers ask — everyone wants to know what will happen if they become the fuckhead. It's not like we're this "peace, love, and happiness" thing or this brotherhood in which everyone's, um, happy — we're running a business here, made up of individuals who are used to running healthy, independent businesses. These guys are all successful. They all have big egos. No one wants to be the turd that everyone's pushing around.

Gathering of Developers is made up of experienced, proven developers who can come up with the goods

Harry Miller, CEO, Ritual Entertainment

NG: But can you make the tough decisions? What happens if all eight developers come to the board meeting and say, "We're running late, we're going to miss the Christmas sales period." Surely someone needs to be forced into making a deadline — who's that someone going to be?

Mike: No, we don't need to have games out for the holidays You ship it when it's fucking finished. Pearl Jam was meant to have a CD out a year ago, but it was late and they were given the time It's a creative process here — that's our whole point. Obviously, it can't be completely open-ended. It can't be, "You guys take as long as you want and give us a call when you're done," but we can cut a little more slack

Harry: And G.O.D.'s companies are professionals — they've been around the block, and they know when to quit and ship something. Besides, they want to make the holiday season because they want to make the big money as much as any other publisher.

NG: Some people question your math. You say that you're going to take profits away from publishers and give them back to developers, but it's not as if many publishers are getting fat these days. The fact is that for every one instance a publisher picks up a game and makes a mint publishing it, there are countless other times when they invest millions of dollars into development of a game that flops. Surely, the few times that a publisher hits the jackpot is fair reward for the many times they gamble and lose?

Mike: There will always be risk, but we can minimize a lot of it. There are several things we can do. First, we can remove a lot of the last-minute surprises. For example, I don't think that there's any way that Epic could have told the G.O.D. board last November that *Unreal* was really going to make Christmas! [laughs]. I mean, they might be able to fool GT — they'll just speak in a language that no one at GT understands until they go, "Err, OK, we'll run some ads," but they wouldn't be able to do this with us. Remember, we're developers also.

One of us would quickly have said, "Excuse me! Bullshit! It's not going to make it!"

Harry: There's this misconception that somehow developers are going to get an easy ride at G.O.D., but think about it — when a product comes in front of the submissions board, it's going to be judged by a jury of not only your peers, but people who have a financial interest in how well the product will do. Everyone is going to be kept on their toes — with a view to staying strong.

NG: And do you think you can guarantee a higher "hit rate" than the mainstream publishers?

Mike: To a certain extent. If you look at the top 10 products each year and take out the shit like Hasbro [laughs] and random sports titles, then it's really the same people making the hits year after year. It might not be the same publisher's names on the boxes, and it might not even be the same developer's name on the credits — because people change companies so often — but you'll find that, more often than not, it's the same people making the hit games.

Harry: And remember, we're not just publishing anyone. Gathering of Developers is made up of experienced, proven developers who can come up with the goods. Now, while this doesn't mean that success is guaranteed, it does mean that we don't have to bankroll a lot of inexperienced startups.

An original idea?

NG: This concept isn't entirely new. Aside from United Artists, Electronic Arts was founded on a very similar premise, back in 1982 ..

Harry: We know that this isn't a new idea. Within the game industry, many people have thought of doing this before, and many people have come up to us and said, "Hey, we though about doing this a few years ago."

Mike: EA kind of tried it, way back when, but back then the time wasn't quite right for this type of organization. There wasn't the money in the industry to give a group of independent developers enough clout to go it alone. But the concept was fine, and EA is still doing very well.

NG: But surely EA is now the single biggest corporate, business-oriented publisher of them all. Doesn't it epitomize everything you think is wrong with the game industry?

Mike: In a way, yes. But EA doesn't really deal with a lot of the top developers, and — as I mentioned before — they, in EA Sports, have perhaps the one legitimate case for publisher branding.

NG: Talk to Peter Molyneux. Around the time he left Bullfrog, he had all sorts of unpleasant things to say about how corporate and distant EA is ...

Mike: Yeah, and you hear similar gripes when you talk to people in Austin ..

NG: But the point is that this is the company that started out with the same ideals you are now championing! Somewhere along the line, people at EA rejected these ideals in favor of a different direction. Aren't you doomed to follow a similar path?

Mike: Not necessarily. It all comes down to key management decisions made at key points along the way. I'm sure it's sometimes very easy to get pleased with yourself, and I'm sure it's easy to start believing that what really matters is marketing and distribution. But G.O.D. is owned by developers — and these people at least will make us keep focused on what we believe to be true. Any time Harry and I start to think that we're geniuses, there will be plenty of people ready to tell us that we're not!

NG: But you are very confident ..

Mike: Yes, we are. We have some really smart people joining us from other publishers — the people we've met along the way who've really impressed us.

And look who we're up against. I mean, who the hell was Eidos? Who are these guys? Domark and U.S. Gold? And suddenly, out of the blue, *Tomb Raider* comes along and they're like this bad-ass publisher? Just this one product, and all of a sudden Eidos can get anything they want? And *Tomb Raider* is still all they've got — and they're still in the top 10. And this is just more testament to how low the competitive level is out there right now. All these one-hit wonders are top 10 publishers. What does that say about the industry? It shows that all the top publishers have just one or two developers who are the hit-makers, and they're using them to subsidize all these other legions of crap that get produced every year.

So if you were to take just the best people, and free these people from having to subsidize everyone else, and let them work more for themselves, then you've got a winning formula. And this is what G.O.D. is all about. It's the best deal out there, and as more and more developers climb aboard, this will become more and more clear. ng

All these one-hit wonders are top 10 publishers. What does that say about the industry?

Mike Wilson, CEO, G.O.D.

Decency crusaders attack coin-ops in Florida: "I was quiet when they came for *Mortal Kombat* ..." • **Color Game Boy announced:** After 11 years, Nintendo introduces a new handheld • **WizardWorks beats *Riven*:** *Deer Hunter*, a budget title, takes the top sales spot • **Movers & Shakers:** Can a Sara Lee exec help Electronic Arts?

news

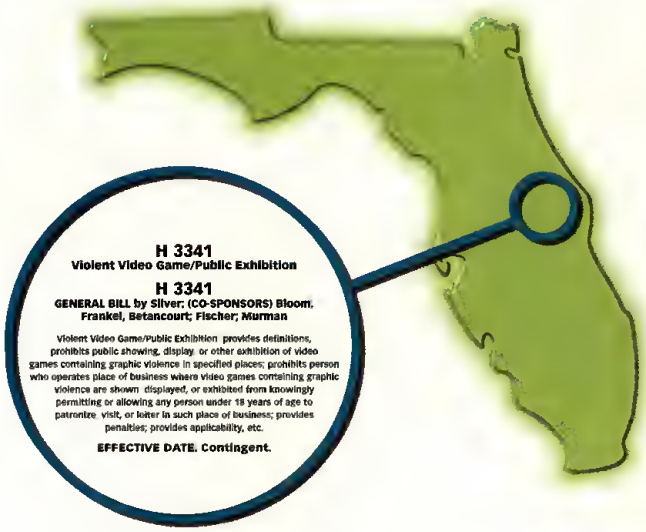
Computer and videogaming's most vital intelligence

Outlawed in Orlando?

IDSA warns of "serious threat" to videogames in Florida

Two politicians in Florida, Representative Barry Silver (Dem.) and Senator John Grant (Rep.), are promoting two bills that would "prohibit the public display of ... videogames displaying graphic violence" throughout the state of Florida. Although the bills have a long way to go before becoming law, the IDSA (Interactive Digital Software Association), the videogame industry's Washington D.C.-based watchdog organization, warns that Florida gamers face a "very real threat" of widespread restrictions and maybe even a total ban. And if one state successfully adopts such a policy, others may follow

Senator John Grant (top) and Representative Barry Silver (above) are taking a stand against the public display of videogame violence



The bills are primarily targeted at coin-op games featuring violent content "including, but not limited to: decapitation; dismemberment; repeated instances of blood-letting; or grotesque cruelty." Grant and Silver want all coin-ops that feature such "graphic violence" removed from public areas, including theater lobbies and family arcades. "We're taking this very seriously," says Elliott Portnoy, counsel to the AAMA (American Amusement Machine Association), the coin-op industry's trade organization. But what makes these bills threatening to all gamers are their vague and loose wording. Gail Markels, the IDSA's general counsel, warns that, if passed, the law could be used to remove boxed games from store shelves, outlaw titles such as *Mario* and *Crash Bandicoot*, and even ban anyone under the age of 18 from entering an Electronics Boutique store. "We are always concerned when legislation is proposed," warns Markels, "but these Florida bills are especially troubling because they are not limited by any strict definitions of what the proposed new law could do."

The bills, tentatively

labeled the Children's Protection from Violence Act, take two virtually identical forms: Senate Draft SB696 and Florida House Bill HB3341. To take a step closer to becoming law, the bills next have to be approved by committee, and this is where videogame trade bodies such as the IDSA, the AAMA, and the AMOA (Amusement & Music Operators Association) are targeting their defense.

"On a lobbying level, our response to the bill is essentially two-fold," explains Markels. "First, we would educate the committee about the industry's efforts to self regulate. The videogame industry already adheres to a voluntary system of ratings and has been applauded by politicians such as Senator Lieberman, who called the ESRB rating system the most comprehensive rating system in the entertainment media, and child advocacy experts such as Peggy Charren. As a result, we don't believe that legislation is necessary because the industry has already stepped up to the plate. Second, prior attempts to restrict the availability of violent content to minors or adults have been

stricken by the Supreme Court, which ruled that such efforts are unconstitutional." Supporting Markels' claim is the 1989 Missouri case of the VSDA (Video Software Dealers Association) versus Webster. In this instance the state of Missouri attempted to pass a law prohibiting minors from renting or buying videocassettes containing violent content. The Federal Court ruled that the law was unconstitutional, it was rejected, and the state of Missouri was ordered to pay the plaintiff's attorney fees of $200,000. It's worth noting that the content guidelines found on videocassette packaging — and even the ratings allocated to movies playing in theaters — are not backed up by any kind of law. Stores and movie theaters choose to enforce these voluntary guidelines, but they don't have to. In fact, legislative attempts to require the enforcement of the MPAA rating system have been declared unconstitutional.

"The only type of content that can be subject to across-the-board restrictions is that which is deemed sexually obscene or harmful to minors in a sexual context," Markels explains. The AAMA's Portnoy concurs with Markels' legal analysis and concludes that the game industry's first line of defense has to include "convincing the decision makers in Florida that there's no way this bill can pass constitutional muster."

Bolstering this line of defense, John Fithian, legal counsel for the National Association of Theater Owners (NATO), has pledged that his organization will help fight the bill with financial support, and Richard Holley, vice president of the AMOA, states, "We will offer every drop of support we have in ... doing whatever we have to do." One of the first steps was commissioning 200 posters for Florida coin-op locations, aimed at nurturing support and recognition for the parental guidance ratings that already accompany every title.

As **Next Generation** goes to press, the situation can be summarized as the game industry having effectively circled the wagons and established its defensive strategy. We'll report developments as they happen — but for now, there seems little threat of any immediate action.

The proposition of the bill has been accompanied by the traditional huffing and puffing of politicians with honorable goals but a slender grip on the facts. **Next Generation** spoke to House Representative Barry Silver, co-proposer of the Florida bills, and the conversation went like this:

NG: Please can you explain the thinking behind your proposed Protection of Children from Violence bill?

Rep. Silver: Certainly. The bill is trying to allow our society to protect itself and its young people from the scourge of the rampant violence that permeates our society.

NG: A noble goal, I'm sure everyone would wish for less violence in our society. But how would your bill help achieve this?

[Pause]

Rep. Silver: The bill would prohibit the display of graphic video violence in any public facility where children — people aged 17 or under — are allowed to congregate.

NG: OK, but how will this reduce the level of violence in society?

[Pause]

Rep. Silver: There's a direct correlation between the viewing of violence and engagement in violence. This correlation is not 100%, in other words not everyone who views violence will act violently, but some will. Therefore, it is beyond dispute that because of the pervasiveness of violence in our media, it is transferring to our society, people are dying, and our communities are not as safe as they used to be.

NG: Do you have any proof of this?

Rep. Silver: What do you mean, proof?

NG: Do you have any proof that people who are exposed to fictional violence in the media actually become more likely to commit acts of real violence in the real world?

Rep. Silver: There is plenty of proof. There is hard scientific evidence to support this. There are no researchers or experts who would dispute this.

NG: Um, I don't think that this is actually the case. Can you cite any research or any experts who support your claim that your theory is, in fact, "hard scientific fact"?

[Pause]

Rep. Silver: I don't have anything in front of me or in my office. But I have professors and experts who will testify when the bill reaches the committee. You must have heard of all these studies that quite clearly show that when a group of children watch a violent movie, they behave in a more violent manner afterwards than a group of children who have watched a nonviolent movie.

NG: Um, no. I've heard of lots of studies that show that when watching violent movies children become excited and their adrenaline levels rise. This then, in the short term, leads them to become more physically active and "boisterous," sure. But there's a big difference between this and proof that they, in the long term, become more violent individuals. Besides, watching a football game or WWF has exactly the same effect.

[Pause]

Rep. Silver: The real harm here isn't that you get an adrenaline rush. The real harm is that gradually you get less and less of an adrenaline rush. Kids become desensitized. The real harm is that violence becomes more acceptable. The thrill that people might have one time experienced by watching violence becomes lessened with each exposure, and eventually, the only way to recapture this thrill is to engage in the real thing. And this means real violence in real life aimed against people or animals.

NG: Again, do you have any proof?

Rep. Silver: Kids who play these games grow to feel that they are experts in this kind of violence. They then seek to test their skills in the real world. There's lots of anecdotal evidence. Just recently there was the terrible case of a high-school kid who walked into a classroom with a gun and shot several of his classmates. Afterwards, he said that he had gotten the idea from a movie. There is too much of this kind of anecdotal evidence to ignore.

NG: That's a terrible story. Professor Henry Jenkins of MIT believes that news footage or documentary footage of real-world violence is a lot more damaging to kids. And taking your argument to its logical extreme, can we take it that you would support banning the Bible or outlawing Disney movies? Both contain often extreme violence ...

> **"Kids who play these games grow to feel that they are experts in this kind of violence"**
> **Barry Silver,** House representative, Florida

What is it?

This realtime strategy game with a German name only saw a limited production run from Sega. Now, the game that arguably inspired titles like *Commond & Conquer* is one of the most sought-after and expensive used 16-bit titles. Hint: #31 of our Top 100.

It is ...

***Herzog Zwei*, an ambitious realtime action/strategy game that featured a transformable Mech, resource management, and gameplay elements that have yet to be matched by a modern title. See next month's preview of *LAPD 2100* for a game that may be *Herzog*'s spiritual successor.**

[Pause]

Rep. Silver: Merely because there may be many types of violence that might be dangerous to children doesn't mean that we shouldn't act in specific areas. But certainly, if it's proven that exposure to nature documentaries and news footage is dangerous, then maybe we should be more cautious. But you must remember that news footage serves some public purpose, and videogames do not. Also, when a child watches news, he is just a passive observer. When he plays a videogame, he is a participant.

NG: Moving on, a couple of legal experts have told us that they believe your bill will prove to be unconstitutional. Something about the First Amendment ...

Rep. Silver: No, this is not unconstitutional. I practice constitutional law, I am aware of the issues. I believe that the Constitution does not prevent society from protecting itself by taking reasonable measures against the scourge of violence.

NG: Have you sought the opinion of an attorney general to confirm this?

Rep. Silver: No, I have not.

NG: Are you aware of the 1989 Missouri case of the VSDA versus Webster? The state was fined $200,000 after attempting to pass an unconstitutional law prohibiting the sale of violent videos to minors.

Rep. Silver: Wow. That's amazing. [Pause] I don't understand how that could have occurred. I don't know Missouri law, but I do know this: In Florida and in every other state, it is constitutional and it is permissible for states to move against the exposure of sexual content to minors. I happen to believe that violence is equally, if not more damaging than sexually explicit material. Therefore, if it is permissible to act against one, surely it should be permissible to act against the other? If the studies indicate that children act out what they see in the media, which presents the greater danger to society? Children acting out acts of sexual explicity or extreme violence?

NG: It seems the focus of your bill is aimed at coin-op games in public places. But the wording is a little ambiguous, and many people worry that the law could be extended to include home videogames for sale in stores. Is this your intention?

Rep. Silver: No, I hadn't originally intended to do this. So no, I don't think the law will stretch this far. If it's just a box on a shelf, then I don't see it being affected by this bill. But this is something for me to look into and something to consider.

NG: Have you anything else to add?

Rep. Silver: So far it seems that those who oppose this proposal are the people who believe that corporations have an absolute right to pervert and pollute the minds of young people for profit. I don't happen to share this view.

> **"I happen to believe that violence is equally, if not more damaging than sexually explicit material"**
> **Barry Silver,** House representative, Florida

Discussing this issue with such people as Mr. Silver is always disquieting because his intentions are, no doubt, honorable. Furthermore, most people in the videogame industry, **Next Generation** staff included, feel uncomfortable citing merely a "lack of hard evidence" as defense against accusations that violent videogames contribute to increasing violence in society. It's a defensive stance, and it sounds worrying, similar to the, "There's no unequivocal proof!" argument behind which the cigarette companies desperately hid for so many years. But whereas it's long been obvious to anyone with a modicum of common sense that smoking cigarettes is bad for one's health, the videogame/violence issue is a lot more complicated — and it's up to magazines like **Next Generation** to make people aware of the broader questions.

Does violence in the media cause violence or merely reflect it?

Do human beings naturally have a certain amount of violence in their nature, violence that will always find an outlet no matter what society may do to suppress it?

Could videogames actually be a harmless, safe outlet for violent urges that otherwise may be directed at real people?

The fact of the matter is that no one knows for sure. Certainly, it's obvious that the likes of House Representative Silver, while with noble intent, are simply offering knee-jerk reactions to a big, complicated problem they don't fully understand. MIT Professor Henry Jenkins (interviewed in **NG 29**) offers an alternative perspective. "The studies seem to suggest that children at an early age make meaningful distinctions between fiction and nonfiction," he points out. "The violence that really disturbs them is the violence they can't break down, the violence that they see as real. This means that the type of media violence that is worst for children is the nature documentaries in which predators eat their prey, or documentaries about [violent] historical events — and yet this is the stuff that teachers, educators, and media reformers think would be good TV for kids."

"Besides," Jenkins offers, "trying to stop children's access to violent imagery in our culture is like trying to empty the Atlantic Ocean with a spoon. You just can't do it. Violence is a part of who we are. Violence is so pervasive throughout childhood culture that it's foolish to think you can stop it. If you are going to go down that path, then let's get rid of all fairy stories, let's get rid of Shakespeare. Why don't we rewrite the Bible so Cain and Abel talk things out?"

> **"Why don't we rewrite the Bible so Cain and Abel work things out?"**
> **Henry Jenkins,** professor, MIT

He has a point, and it's only reasonable to conclude that — ultimately — the jury's still out on this one. And while we wait for concrete proof either way, shouldn't individuals and parents have a right to choose for themselves? The videogame industry has already adopted a voluntary ratings system designed to give parents the opportunity to make informed choices. Congress is happy with it, child advocacy groups are happy with it, the industry itself is happy with it, and even good ol' Senator Lieberman's happy with it — and we all know how hard he is to please.

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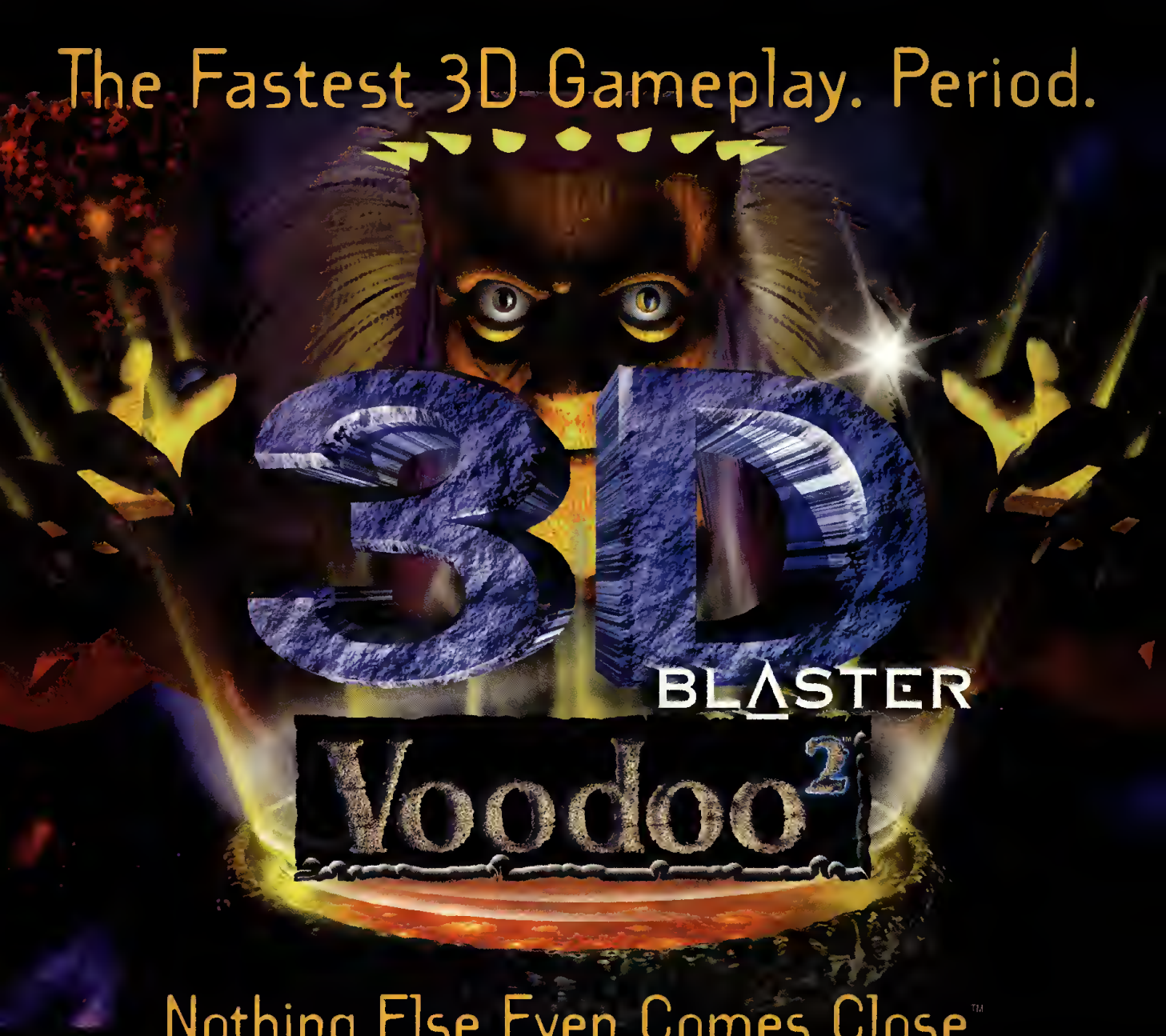

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Nintendo takes a baby step in technology, hoping for the same success it had with Game Boy

Datastream

Facts and figures taken from CEMA's U.S. Consumer Electronics Sales & Forecasts report. Estimated sales of game hardware in 1997: $1.65 billion. Estimated sales of gaming software in 1997: $3.9 billion. Projected increase in software sales for 1998: $50 million. Total consumer electronics sales (including VCRs, home security systems, etc.): ~$72 billion. Percentage videogames contributed to total consumer electronic sales: ~7.8%. Projected factory sales of home computers in 1998: $17.6 billion. Projected factory sales of total consumer electronics by the year 2001: $92 billion. Considering current videogame share of total consumer electronics, the potential videogame hardware and software sales for the year 2001: ~$7.2 billion. Storage size of a CD-ROM: 650 MB. Storage size of a single-sided Apple II 5.25" floppy disk: 144K. Number of floppies needed to hold 650MB: 4,623. Approximate height of a stack of 4,623 floppy disks: 15'2". Height of *Riven*, if it were converted to floppies: 75'10" (23,115 floppies). Height of stack of floppies used to contain the game's executable file (no graphics or sound): 5/8 of an inch (seven floppies).

Nintendo's official mid-March announcement confirmed rumors that had been floating around for some time: There will be a new Game Boy model this year, and it will have a color screen, capable of displaying up to 56 colors out of a palette of 32,000 on a Sharp-designed reflective LCD display. Further, it seems the new handheld will be backward-compatible with original Game Boy titles. Is this what gamers were hoping for?

Not necessarily. Don't forget that Atari Lynx, Sega's Game Gear and Nomad, as well as the Turbo Express by NEC had much more power, faster processing, and rather impressive color screens — and lost the consumer war against the 4MHz, grayscale, yet vastly cheaper Game Boy. Indeed, Game Boy is the single most successful game system in history. It not only outsold the handheld competition but also surpassed sales of any console on a per unit basis. Nintendo's move to color is a particularly odd one considering its usual, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" mode of operation. Game Boy sales have shown no signs of slowing down, with three million sold in 1997 alone.

So why make a color unit now? Simple: Most developers are interested in newer technology, and trying to find any developer willing to start a Game Boy project — despite a market crying for new titles — is nearly impossible. Hence, the Color Game Boy.

All well and good, but as with many things Nintendo, there are some odd barriers. Foremost, it seems logical that a color Game Boy would need Super Game Boy support. "To get the full effect of Super Game Boy," says one developer, "the new handheld will have to have Super Nintendo hardware to allow for the sound and processing of games like *Space Invaders*, which downloads a packet of code to run directly on the Super Nintendo." This makes it very unlikely we'll see full compatibility. Further, consider the particularly confusing color palette that allows for 56 colors instead of the logical, binary-friendly 64 colors that are traditionally supported by software engineering rules, as well as the announcement of 10-color support for classic Game Boy games when Super Game Boy allows for 14 in-game colors and a 64-color border.

The answer could lie in the Sharp screen, which may not be physically capable of supporting more than 56 colors once it's optimized for minimal battery consumption versus display capability. Battery longevity was another advantage the original Game Boy enjoyed over its flashier handheld competition. Another explanation could be that the remaining eight-color indexes are reserved for translucency or special command transfers to the new hardware.

Super Game Boy compatibility may be included in a more limited capacity, displaying only the color palettes for sprites and backgrounds, therefore matching the 10-color limit.

The industry will be watching when Nintendo unveils the next generation handheld system at this year's E3 convention in Atlanta. Game Boy's strong library of games, coupled with a new interface port enabling N64 interactivity, could be all that Nintendo needs to avoid another Virtual Boy. Will gamers who have just purchased a new Game Boy feel cheated? If the rumored price tag of $79 is true, it probably won't be an issue. ng

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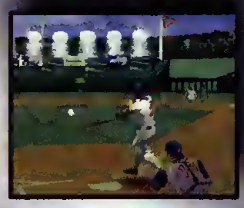

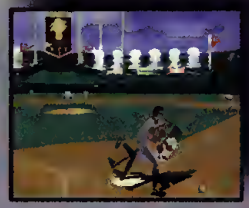

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In the Studio

Development news as it develops

Everyone from the CGDC to fanzines has tried to lend credibility to the game medium with awards banquets that have never mustered industry support; a perfect vehicle, however, may have finally arrived with the Interactive Academy of Arts and Sciences. This nonprofit organization is modeled after the film academy but is not related to that organization. The Interactive Academy's board of directors lists executives from companies like Electronic Arts, Nintendo, and Sega, to name a few.

ACADEMY OF INTERACTIVE ARTS AND SCIENCES

The first annual awards presentation will be in Atlanta on May 28, the opening evening of the E3 trade show. To become a voting member of the Academy, applicants must submit proof of experience within the interactive development or publishing community. However, limited, nonvoting memberships are also available. For more information on the Academy, see its web page at www.interactive.org.

Why did Chris Roberts spend so much time filling the *Wing Commander* series with expensive FMV? The answer now is obvious. Roberts was just getting in some practice before taking the directorial helm of the full-length, feature film version of *Wing Commander*. The film, budgeted at $27 million, was written by Roberts and two others and has begun shooting in

Luxembourg. The new story draws elements from the first four *Wing Commander* games, but Malcolm McDowell (as Admiral Tolwyn) is the only returning cast member from the games. Leading the film cast is Freddie Prinze, Jr. (*I Know What You Did Last Summer*), who replaces Mark Hamill in the role of Lieutenant Christopher Blair. Other game properties hot in film pre-production include *Tomb Raider* and *Duke Nukem*, both of which should follow *Wing Commander* into production later this year.

Jackie Chan has teamed up with Radical Entertainment to bring a new action game to PlayStation. Expect to see Jackie

on game screens later this year. In other celebrity news, Universal Interactive and its Universal Digital Arts development house are working on *Xena: Warrior Princess* for PlayStation, a 3D adventure with heavy

combat elements. As of press time, the company was in negotiations to use the voice of *Xena* actress Lucy Lawless in the game.

Hoping to maximize the returns on its expensive NFL license, Sony is expanding its football library with *NFL Extreme*. This five-on-five, arcade-style football game for PlayStation is undoubtedly going to be reminiscent of Midway's recent arcade success, *NFL Blitz*. Look for it in stores this summer.

While not formally announced, it has come to **Next Generation**'s attention that EA Sports is hard at work on a boxing game for PlayStation and PC. No word yet as to when the game is going to be released or who's involved, but a source within EA says, "This is going to be the must-have boxing game for fans of the sport."

Electronic Arts has signed a licensing agreement with Atlantic Records, whereby several of the label's bands will provide music for the upcoming *Road Rash 3D*. The most notable band in the deal is Sugar Ray, which will be joined by CIV, Full on the Mouth, The Mermen, Kid Rock, and The Tea Party. The musical stylings of these bands range from surf rock to electronica, and several bands will provide some originally scored music for the game. A soundtrack will also be sold separately and will ship simultaneously with the game this spring.

GAMES
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WizardWorks proves success can be cheap

The budget arm of GT knocks *Riven* from top spot

Developing games is too expensive and too risky, we can't afford to innovate. And so goes the tiresome saw of many developers as they roll out yet another cookie-cutter racing game or brawler.

WizardWorks, the Minnesota-based budget software division of GT, has proven them all wrong. Developed for less than $100,000 by Sunstorm Interactive (whose previous credits include *DukeIZone* and *HIZone*, expansion packs for GT products), *Deer Hunter* has been on PC Data's best-seller list since it hit shelves last October, selling more than 182,000 units. In January the game hit number one, ahead of *Riven*, *Quake 2*, and *Tomb Raider II*.

According to sources, the game may never have been released if it weren't for an executive at Wal-Mart, who wasn't happy with the kinds of games the store was selling. He mentioned to a WizardWorks rep that if he only had a game about deer hunting, he could sell thousands. WizardWorks listened, and the product was created as a Wal-Mart exclusive. It has since been released to other retailers.

As in real-life hunting, players have to be patient when they finally spot a deer. Any sudden movement could scare him away

With such success, it is little wonder that an expansion pack and sequel are already in the works. "We continue huge promotional campaigns focused on *Deer Hunter* at accounts across the country and foresee no end in sight," says Nicole Yolitz, marketing manager for GT's Value Division.

"Obviously we're happy about the sales," says Anthony Campiti, president of Sunstorm. "We struck on a market that was untapped, the box looked good, and it was a good product. It may not be a technological marvel, but it's fun." Does Campiti see a lesson for other developers in *Deer Hunter*'s success? "Lots of companies say, 'We need two years [to develop a game], and if it isn't a hit, we're in trouble.' We can do things more efficiently."

Efficiency doesn't mean sacrificing innovation, though, says Campiti. "If you look at the products we've done, we think we have always added a distinct new feel or element. Look at *Duke It Out in D.C.* We provided real environments to play in, which no one has really done with a first-person shooter. On *Deer Hunter*, we faced quite a challenge — how do you make a game out of something that is basically sitting around for hours and hours? We needed to make it hard to kill a deer to add balance. If you were shooting every 15 seconds, it wouldn't be deer hunting."

Sunstorm is now doing an add-on pack for the product in what has suddenly become the hottest genre around. A recent trip to Electronics Boutique turned up no less than three competing products — *Big Game Hunter*, *Wild Turkey Hunting*, and a shovel-ware CD collection of bad hunting games.

Deer Hunter will probably never rake in *Quake*-level profits, but the lesson for developers is clear: By innovating, not imitating (and by keeping a good eye on the market), a fantastic return on investment is possible. ng

It may not look like much, but getting a 10-point buck in your sight is more exhilarating to some gamers than playing *Quake*

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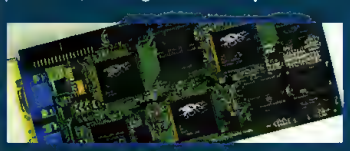
Gadget

3D Blaster Voodoo²

Price:	$300
Manufacturer:	Creative Labs
System:	PC

The first Voodoo² board on the market weighs in at a hefty 12MB of 100ns RAM, which is divided into dual 4MB texture buffers and a 4MB texture buffer (supporting single board resolutions as high as 800x600 and SLI dual board resolutions as high as 1024x768). The card itself is a serious performer, although it adheres quite strictly to 3Dfx's reference board design and shipped initially with 3Dfx's reference drivers. The result is amazing performance in games like *Quoke 2* or *Forsaken*, which have been optimized to take advantage of the second texture unit. There were, however, some problems with quitting from several Direct3D games.



The first Voodoo² board out of the gate is also one of the beefiest at 12MB

Performance for this board puts it at the top of the line with regard to all of the cards **Next Generation** has ever tried. It is by far the fastest *Quoke 2* board ever tested, and it even outperforms Nvidia's Riva 128 in Direct3D. As with all 3Dfx-based technologies, the 3D Blaster Voodoo² only runs 3D in full screen (no windowed modes) and does not offer any 2D capabilities. Only owners of Pentium 2s should contemplate purchasing this card, however, as performance is extremely CPU-dependent. According to **Next Generation's** tests, a Pentium 2 266 sees nearly double the performance in *Quoke 2* as a Pentium 200.

Dual board SLI test - **Creative 3D Blaster Voodoo²**

	Quake2 (1024x768)	Quake2 (800x600)	Forsaken (640x480)	Forsaken (1024x768)
Pentium II 300 64MB RAM	44.6fps	61.3fps	68.9fps	80.2fps

Single board test - **Creative 3D Blaster Voodoo²**

	Quake2 (800x600)	Quake2 (640x480)	Forsaken (800x600)	Forsaken (640x480)
Pentium II 266 64MB RAM	45.7fps	54.5fps	69.1fps	08.1fps
Pentium 200 64MB RAM	28.8fps	31.2fps	n/a	n/a
Pentium 166 32MB RAM	24.9fps	26.4fps	n/a	n/a

Tests were conducted as gamers will play the game. Sound was left on, no GL tweaks were made, and the frame rate given was an average of demo1 dm2 and demo2 dm2 with two attempts each. There was about a 1fps difference between turning on and off 8-bit textures. The *Forsaken* demo was run twice at each resolution after which the results were averaged

Monster 3D 2

Price:	$200
Manufacturer	Diamond
System:	PC

Diamond's follow-up to the massively popular Monster 3D is an 8MB board, although a 12M8 board will be shipping in the not-so-distant future. The major difference from Creative's offering is the smaller texture buffers (dual 2MB), although the Monster does have the same size 4MB frame buffer (both manufacturers are using 100ns RAM from Silicon Magic). Diamond claims that it has made some modifications to the 3Dfx reference designs, but it has not disclosed what those changes are. At the same time, the drivers that shipped with the Diamond board seem to be slightly more developed and offer a little more stability, especially when returning to Windows when quitting a game. As with the Creative 3D Blaster Voodoo², it is difficult to justify the purchase price of said boards unless you have at least a Pentium 200, despite both companies' claims

Diamond's Voodoo² offering isn't as hefty, but it runs even smoother

In performance tests, the Monster 3D 2 pretty much matched its slightly larger Creative cousin in both *Quoke 2* and *Forsoken* (which is used to test Direct3D performance). The reasons for this? First off, neither game is really making use of the larger texture buffers in the 12MB boards (though they should in the future). Second, at higher CPU speeds (333MHz and up), the differences should become slightly more apparent.

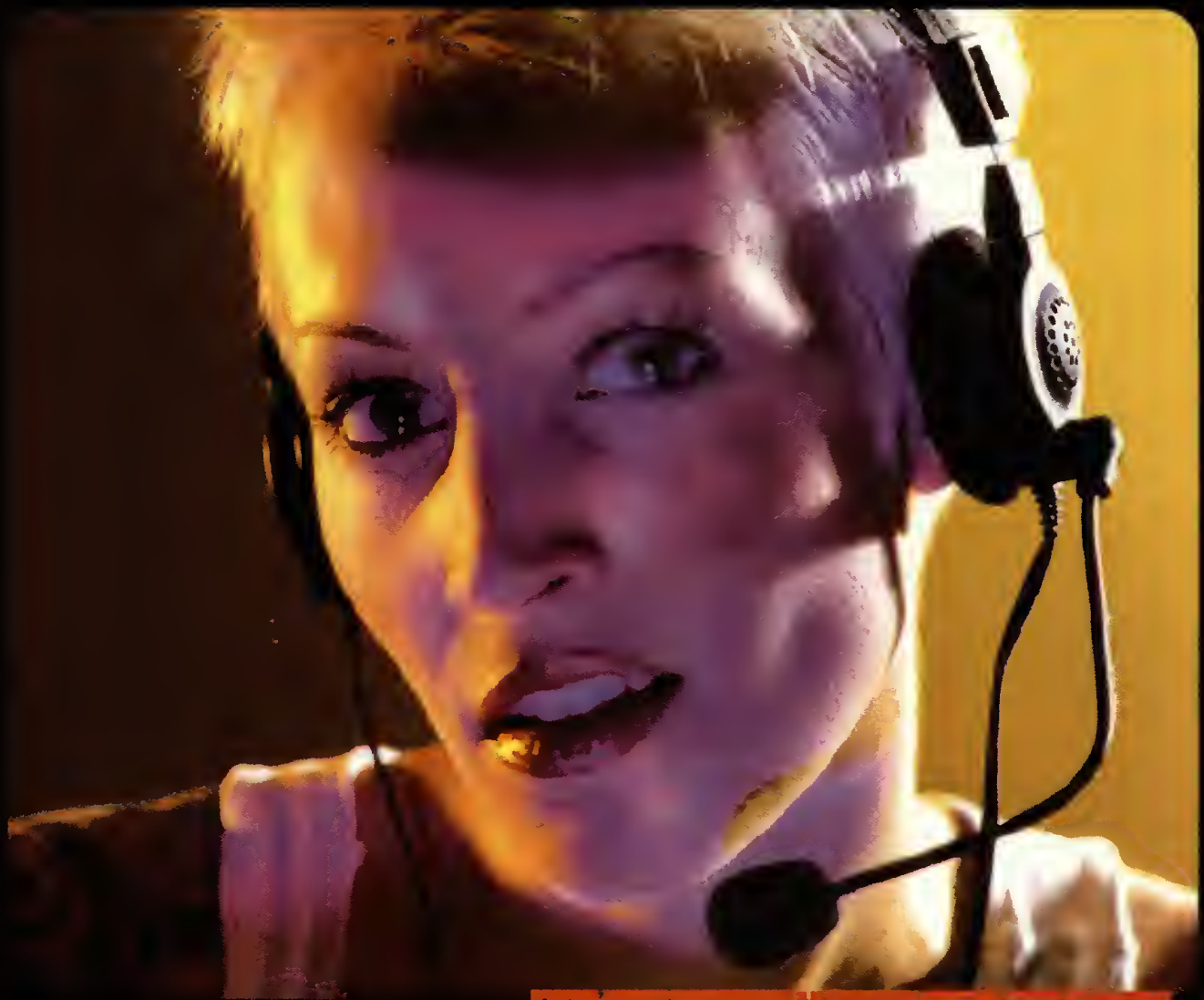
Both boards can be combined with a second identical board to allow for scanline interleaving (where each board is responsible for rendering alternate scanlines of a display). The result is considerably higher fill rates and, of course, faster corresponding frame rates. While not a cheap solution, the SLI provides a gaming experience that will almost certainly remain unmatched by any other technology in 1998.

Single board test - **Diamond Monster 3D 2**

	Quake2 (800x600)	Quake2 (640x480)	Forsaken (800x600)	Forsaken (640x480)
Pentium II 300 64MB RAM	44.6fps	54.1fps	68.9fps	106.4fps
Pentium 200 64MB RAM	28.8fps	31.2fps	n/a	n/a

SLI configuration was not available

QUIT PLAYING WITH YOURSELF



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Movers and Shakers

The business news that affects the games you play

by **Colin Campbell**

Colin Campbell is **Next Generation**'s International Correspondent

In defense of EA

Apart from the fact that both support a large community of clowns, the game industry and the traveling circus business do not have much in common. Unlike tiger trainers or trapeze artists, few of us are actually born and bred in this industry. We are all outsiders.

It's bizarre then that so many of us share a nasty xenophobia about those happy souls who migrate to this lovely business in senior capacities. The more successful these creatures are in their native businesses — especially entertainment businesses — the less hearty our welcome.

There is at least an appearance of warped sense underlying this view of newcomers to the upper echelons of our wonky meritocracy. Somebody skilled in producing, say, pornographic movies or spoken-word CDs is not necessarily going to able to write the next *Ultima* game. Likewise, the Dodgers have yet to hire a lipstick saleswoman as head coach. Mostly they hire fat guys who used to swing baseball bats.

As a top exec with Sara Lee, John Riccitiello used to sell delicious frozen cakes to America. For the past six months he's been the chief operating officer at EA. His job is to take EA through that tricky billion-dollars-a-year phase. (Readers should be aware that I have just deleted a truly unhilarious sentence that attempted to introduce Riccitiello with a series of terrible "cake" puns. I humbly accept your gratitude for destroying the abomination.)

Next Generation was afforded the first interview with Riccitiello, in which he shocked me with his insistence on actually answering my questions, appearing to know what he was talking about and proffering opinions likely to be of interest to readers.

He thinks most of the marketing in our industry is inspired by dull thinking. "Our industry is best described as cookie-cutter marketing. There's been a way to market titles in this business, and my guess is that you can describe it as well as I could. You get enough print advertising and you get decent editorial, you try to create some hype ... and depending on what you want to expect in volume, you go on TV."

He adds: "That's a pretty flat model, and I think you can be a lot more creative and innovative in helping people understand what the products are all about."

A few years ago he successfully introduced Haagen Dazs to Europeans with a famously steamy campaign that went down well, though mercifully, this doesn't mean we're going to be subjected to yet more "sex" campaigns from lame brains who believe that because sex sometimes sells some things, it must always be used to sell all things.

One of his tasks, he points out, is to raise the skills level at EA. He dispenses with the vacuous rigmarole of pretending that everyone who works for him must, de facto, be a demi-God. "I have to make sure I've got the right organizations in place — better people, better trained. Something I've done a lot of — which has made some people happy and probably some not — is to reject an awful lot of mediocre thinking. Maybe the advertising's not good enough or the promotional ideas aren't good enough or PR ideas aren't good enough. [We need to] push them for more. Just push them for more.

"EA has got a bevy of great people, but if we can seed them in with a few more that have different experiences and then raise the bar in expectations, then hopefully in the process, we'll identify what amounts to greatness."

He also admits that EA's decision-making process is influenced by the self-interested desire to maintain a balance of power between the hardware manufacturers, who are his biggest competitors but who also hold the keys to EA's future prosperity and growth.

His view is that they are "like the rain" — something necessary but apt to spoil a good day out. "It's not much fun paying them a royalty, but life would be harder without them."

I turn to the subject of EA Sports and suggest that it's not what it used to be and that the victory of Sony's *GameDay* over EA's *Madden* represented the brand's inevitable decay after years of aggressive competition. This did not go down well with him at all.

"Something I've done a lot of — which has made some happy and some not — is to reject an awful lot of mediocre thinking"

John Riccitiello, COO, EA

"What data are you using for that? In calendar '96, according to TRSTS, we had a 48 share on sports, which is damn good. In calendar '97, we had a 58 share of sports. So while I'm highly respectful of the accomplishments of Sony on PlayStation with *GameDay*, we had more competition than we had in the past, and we added 10 market share points — it's a record share for us. We feel pretty damn successful about '97.

"Yes, we noticed that Sony sold more than us during that quarter — we sold more during the year — so we feel badly about that quarter with that one game, but we don't want to be second place. I'm not Babe Ruth, who's going to point at the fence and claim the home run before it's done, but it ain't going to happen this year.

"Do I wish we had sold another 100,000 copies of *Madden* on PlayStation so we would have sold more in the quarter than they did? Sure. But I am happy that even though we were outspent seven or eight to one on television, we sold within 15% in units and 10% of dollars to Sony. And I'm virtually certain that if we'd have matched their spend, we'd have blown them out of the water."

Riccitiello stresses that he wants EA's games to have more universal appeal. He wants life to be easier for newcomers to gaming, and he wants gamers who are stuck in their own genre ghettos to try to live a little and get into new kinds of gaming.

In short, he wants EA to make more money by communicating more effectively with its customers and ultimately making better games. Isn't that sweet?

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The latest arcade and coin-op news

by **Marcus Webb**

Marcus Webb is the editor of *RePlay* magazine

Sequel mania at London and Tokyo expos

Sequels dominated two recent trade shows for the arcade industry: the ATEI show held in London last January and the AOU show held in Tokyo in February. Sega, Namco, Taito, Capcom, SNK, and ICE all weighed in with follow-ups to earlier hits. From what we hear, likely worldwide successes include *Sega Rally 2* (partially complete at show time) and Namco's *Time Crisis 2* (running on its System 23 board). Sega's *Virtua On 2: CyberTroopers* drew huge crowds in Tokyo, but since it's a sequel to an original game that didn't draw well in the U.S., it is not expected to make much of a splash outside Japan. ICE's *Police Trainer 2* was shown in London and should be a good bet for the U.S. and other overseas markets.

Sequel mania in Tokyo continued with transfers, plus *Bubble Bobble 4*. Jaleco avoided sequelizing with *AsuraBlade: Sword of Destiny*, as did Midway and Atari, whose lineup in both London and Tokyo included Atari's new *California Speed Driver*.

Tecmo showed a sequel, but it was an odd duck: *Cool Boarders 2* began life, of course, as a home game for PlayStation and has now been translated to arcade format.

Despite Ch. 11, new Namco arcades, games, and LBEs coming

Namco Cybertainment Inc. (NCI), America's largest arcade chain, will probably close less than 50 of its 370 U.S. arcades during its current Chapter 11 status. In fact, NCI will probably be opening some new, nonmall arcades under the reorganization, according to

While in reorganization, NCI will continue opening new centers

Sega's *Fighting Vipers 2*, and SNK's *Real Bout 2: the Newcomers* and *Metal Slug 2*, both recognized for their Neo Geo 64 cabinet. Sega escaped sequel land with its new *Harley Davidson & LA Riders*, a cool motorcycle game. Capcom, however, didn't — its Tokyo booth included *Street Fighter EX 2*, as well as a new game, *Star Gladiator*, which offers two-player weapons-based combat. Another key Capcom title, *Marvel Vs. Capcom*, is a sequel in spirit if not in name, pitting familiar characters from earlier Capcom videos against each other.

Beyond *TC2*, Namco's Tokyo booth had the fighting game *Ehrgeiz*. Also shown was *Downhill Bikers* on Namco's new System 23 board and *Techno Drive*, a stand-up driving video with a "test your skills" theme and a unique twist — after each play, it prints out a driver assessment report sheet. Namco's *Motocross Go!* bike video and *Rapid River* shoot-the-works video simulator also appeared at AOU and ATEI.

Konami avoided sequels altogether. In Tokyo it showed several new items: the gun game *TeraBust*, the fighting game *Battle Tryst*, the deluxe simulator *Skier's High*, and the music video novelty *Beat Mania*, along with several current titles that were also seen in London like *Racing Jam* and *Fighting Bujuitsu*.

Taito jumped on the AOU sequel bandwagon with *Go By Train 2*, a follow-up to a Japanese market hit that makes a complex game out of — believe it or not — subway

Namco America President Kevin Hayes. NCI, a subsidiary of Namco Ltd., Tokyo, filed for protection from creditors under U.S. bankruptcy laws on January 29, citing weaker mall traffic, which had hurt arcade profitability. Express purpose of the Chapter 11 move, to pressure mall landlords to reduce rent prices. Sources put NCI's revenue in its fiscal year 1996 at $130 million from 370 arcades and 170 revenue sharing locations (i.e., game rooms in other establishments).

Hayes said that while in reorganization, NCI will continue opening new centers. Meanwhile, Namco Ltd. (Tokyo) and its U.S. factory subsidiary (Namco America) are closing out a strong fiscal year, thanks to super home video sales, solid home game sales, and decent Japanese arcade performance. The company also has some very promising new arcade titles on tap and is beginning to move ahead with plans to build LBE sites in the U.S. under the "XS" brand name starting in 1999.

Sega: big changes

Anticipating weak revenue and profit statements at Japan's March 31 fiscal year-end, Sega began a major shake-up in January and February. After two years of running Sega's U.S. home game division, former Honda exec Shoichiro Irimajiri took the top job over all of Sega Enterprises (Japan), replacing Hayao Nakayama, who moved over to be Sega's vice-chairman, where he'll still run Sega's arcade business. Also, Sega cut more than 100 personnel in divisions like Sega of America, SegaSoft, and GameWorks street operations. Japanese news services reported a division or two would be "liquidated."

Is it enough? Sega's gross revenues were down 27.5%; profits fell by 16.5%; and home video sales were down 63% compared to last year. The only good news was that coin-op sales rose 6.6%. In February, the arcade industry was abuzz with reports from reliable sources that even bigger changes could be coming from Sega Ltd., Sega of America, and Sega GameWorks on the highest structural and corporate levels. But if this happens, it will take considerable time to organize these moves and secure agreement among the many entities in this complex picture.

Meanwhile, Sega's going forward with mini-arcades in selected units of the nationwide Wal-Mart chain. Also, a second funcenter concept called "Stage 35" — smaller and more family-oriented than the original GameWorks chain — has moved from the drawing board to the Foothills Mall in Tucson, Arizona. Another Stage 35 has been announced for Irvine, California.

NASCAR simulators

What, another simulator center concept? Yep, and it's from Northern California's Silicon Valley. According to *The Business Journal*, you can now visit the Mall of America (Bloomington, Minnesota) and experience a place called the "NASCAR Silicon Motor Speedway," which was created by LBE Technologies, Inc. (Cupertino, California). It's a very pricey, elaborate simulator center that includes 12 linked motion platforms (stock-car racing replicas) with big-screen graphics and lavish audio systems. The total experience runs around 25 minutes, from your first briefing to post-race performance evaluations for each driver.

The Business Journal says LBE Technologies will open a second site at Woodfield Mall in Schaumburg, Illinois. The company is hoping to open four additional locations for 1998 and 12 more sites for 1999.

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Retroview

Anecdotes from computer and videogaming's past

Photo **finished**

In an industry in which silly ideas occasionally do well (Color Game Boy comes to mind), it's always maddening to see great ideas get destroyed. In 1980, Ralph Baer, the man who invented the Magnavox Odyssey, came up with a brilliant idea that met with ignominious failure. Being the brilliant inventor that he was, Baer wanted to place a digital camera in the marquee of an arcade videogame machine. The camera would take pictures of players and display them on the screen beside their high scores — an infinitely more attractive payoff than just showcasing their initials.

This is how the proposed plan would work: Players would see their faces digitized on the screen, smile until they liked the way they looked, and push a button. The digitized picture would be stored in RAM and become available for use, either during the game as the head of the player's character, or in the credits to appear next to the scores and the initials of the player.

I figured every confirmed videogame player in the cities of Chicago and New York would be running around from arcade to arcade to get his mug up. It seemed like a surefire hit to me.

— Ralph Baer, inventor

Baer built a prototype camera and took it to Marvin Glass Associates, the firm through which he generally marketed his inventions. Glass loved the idea and put Baer in contact with Bally/Midway, which sent an engineer named John Persurb to look at his idea. Like Glass, Persurb was impressed.

The next step was to install the camera in an experimental game cabinet. After some discussion, Baer set the camera up in an experimental machine in a Chicago-area arcade to test public interest.

It didn't take long for Bally/Midway to reject Baer's invention. Within two days of placing the prototype in a test site, company officials called Baer to tell him that they were not interested and doubted if any other companies would want the idea.

"The second day, some guy gets up on a chair, drops his pants in front of the camera, and that was the end of the product"

Ralph Baer, designer of the failed videogame digital camera

To make a long story short, they put it on display in an arcade in Chicago, and it did very well the first day. The second day, some guy gets up on a chair, drops his pants in front of the camera, and that was the end of the product.

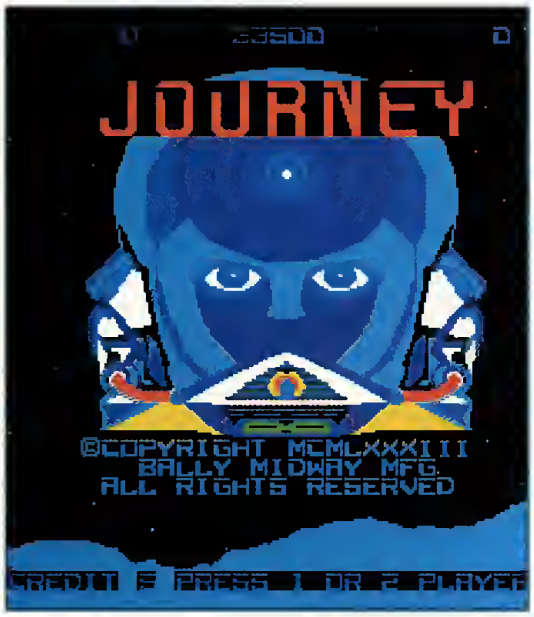
— Ralph Baer

by **Steven Kent**

A frequent contributor to **Next Generation**, Steven Kent is the author of a forthcoming book on the history of videogames

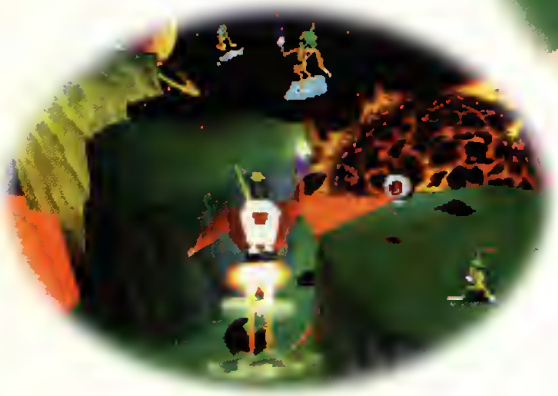
Considering that Namco's president, Masaya Nakamura, used the name *Pac-Man* for fear of what vandals might do to a game called *Puck-Man*, and Taito decided to restrict the number of letters people could put by their high scores to three to avoid a raft of offensive words, the flaw in Baer's plan should have been obvious.

Actually, Baer's camera still managed to play a role in videogame history. Shortly after its arcade demise, Baer received another request for his camera. Bally/Midway was preparing to make a videogame using images from one of the hottest bands of the time — Journey. The game featured digitized photos of the heads of lead singer Steve Perry and other musicians from the band, and it was Baer's camera that took those photos.



Beer's invention did help enable one of the weirdest coin-op titles ever. Players had to guide each member of Journey as he recovered his instrument and made it back to the mother ship. The final reward? A five-second concert, played from a looping cassette tape

Some superhero. He doesn't even know the definition of fearless and courageous.



No x-ray eyes. No fancy-schmancy belt. What's so special about this guy?

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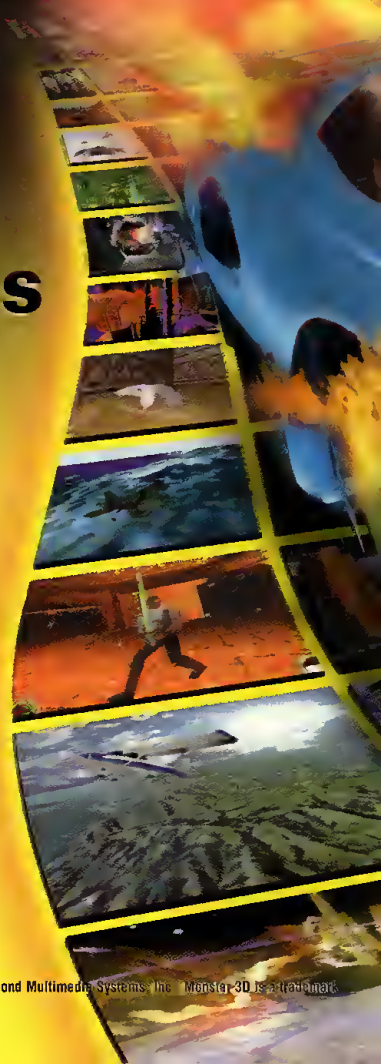

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In 1995 a group of savvy game industry veterans assembled in a small San Francisco office. Backed by a multibillion-dollar music distributor, this company prepared to take on the industry's giants. Experienced developers were on board, and with NBA and Major League Soccer licenses secured, this was to be no Rocket Science. But someone pulled the plug on what should have been a major new publishing contender. What happened? **Next Generation** gives you ...

The fall of BMG

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INTERACTIVE
Employee
San Francisco Studio
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f BMG Entertainment

The rise and fall of BMG Interactive is in many ways unspectacular. Media companies constantly dive blindly into the industry on nothing more than a hope, only to find the game market to be more than they bargained for — Viacom, Time-Warner, and Disney's efforts come to mind. But while BMG Interactive had much in common with previous game industry wannabes — name recognition, experience in other entertainment media, and importantly, a fat checkbook — it had one thing those companies lacked: a phenomenal lineup of games and developers. So if BMG had all the right stuff, how did the company's plans go so wrong?

The initial promise of BMG Interactive can be directly attributed to its VP of global product development, Don Traeger. Having arrived in 1995 to take charge of a directionless, year-old interactive division, Traeger, the man who had launched EA Sports, took charge of signing and managing the development of games. In just two years, he set up a burgeoning San Francisco studio and secured the rights to a number of promising titles (see boxouts). By 1997, BMG Interactive looked poised to become a publishing force that could compete with the likes of Activision and Electronic Arts. Supported by BMG Entertainment, a major music distribution company valued at $5.3 billion, the company had both the talent and cash to make it work. But unfortunately, those kind of revenues often mean big company politics.

BMG's first mistake was splitting up the interactive division, established in 1994, into three offices: the San Francisco office, set up by Traeger, which was responsible for product acquisition and marketing; the New York branch, which took charge of U.S. sales and distribution; and the European division, which managed its own acquisition and distribution. From the start, there were problems with this setup. Says Traeger, "When you really want to act like a startup and really build a solid team around a business, it is pretty dysfunctional to have an East Coast and a West Coast office."

"We were planning to become a real power force in the industry"

Laurie Thornton-Neff, former BMG Interactive public relations director

But this is hindsight. Back in 1995 and 1996, Traeger was more concerned about poising BMG Interactive to be a powerhouse. To do this, he brought in an impressive staff of industry-savvy veterans, including marketing staff from Namco and Capcom, and producers from Electronic Arts. "The climate and the environment was very positive," says Laurie Thornton-Neff, BMG Interactive's former public relations director, who had been with Capcom during the height of the *Street Fighter II* frenzy. "Everybody was really excited and pumped up to be a part of this new organization. We were planning to become a real power force in the industry."

Together with Executive Producer Mike Suarez, Traeger began to hunt down titles. At first, he assumed the division's affiliation with a music company created a mutual understanding. "We thought, 'They understand giving garage bands money, and good things happening, and managing creative talent like that,'" says Traeger.

But that didn't mean Traeger wasn't interested in the bottom line. One former BMG developer remembers when Traeger and Suarez appeared on the scene. "They were throwing around really big money, but they knew what they were doing. They were trying to go after EA. They just were blunt about it."

Traeger disagrees, contending that it would have been ludicrous for BMG to try and go head-to-head with EA. Instead, his strategy was to create top-shelf products that could strategically fill gaps left unfilled by the bigger publishers.

BMG's legacy

When BMG cut its corporate cord from the San Francisco studio, some games were immediately sold. Electronic Arts picked up *Moto Racer* while ASC jumped on *Mass Destruction* and recently, DMA Design's controversial *Grand Theft Auto*. Other BMG games in the works were given face-lifts while some proceeded normally under the auspices of other publishers. Here's a look at forthcoming games started by BMG and being finished under Take 2 Interactive or another label.

Project Name:
Dragon Blade

Format:	PC/PlayStation
New Publisher:	TBA
Developer:	Delphine
Release Date:	TBA

Still tenuously in development (the majority of Delphine's resources have been put behind *Moto Racer 2*), this 3D RPG with a cast of medieval characters has gone through several iterations. In the beginning, the fully 3D world resembled *Tomb Raider*, but the game switched to a more *Diablo*-like overhead perspective. Considering the company's experience with past adventures (remember *Flashback*?), *Dragon Blade* will probably feature a fairly cohesive design.

Project Name:
Undisclosed
military flight sim

Format:	PC
New Publisher:	EA/Jane's Sims
Developer:	Pixel Multimedia
Release Date:	TBA

Not much is known about this Middle Eastern group of game developers who also fly for the Israeli Air Force. But given their flight experience and what Traeger describes as a "very impressive terrain generator," it's no wonder this group was quickly picked up by the people in charge of EA's *Jane's* series. Who better than the guys who do it for real? EA would not comment on the title.

Specifically, in sports, his strategy was to beat EA to Nintendo 64 and bring a top-notch soccer sim to PlayStation and PC during the decline of the *FIFA* engine.

But to compete with the big boys of the industry, a new company has to be ready. And BMG wasn't. In the opinion of many former BMG employees, the distribution arm in New York wasn't aware of the demands of competing with the sales force of an EA or GT. "The effort on the East Coast in terms of sales/distribution," Traeger claims, "was to move a couple of guys over from video and CD distribution, with the idea that BMG is big enough to get any kind of distribution it needs."

The distribution arm was wrong. It would be the first falling domino to bring down the division.

In a moment of panic, BMG Entertainment's decision on how to solve the distribution problem was to simply pull the plug

Clash of the Titans

Prior to Traeger's arrival at BMG, the decisions being made in the interactive division were not the wisest, to put it charitably. BMG Entertainment had already made a futile investment of eight million dollars in Rocket Science, which would never be recouped. And before Traeger set up the studio in San Francisco, acquisitions were being made by executives in the New York office, led by BMG Interactive President Jay Moses, who hailed from a television and music background. Sources say Moses and the other executives were "clueless about the interactive entertainment industry," as they had been securing reference multimedia and edutainment titles, as well as a few games, in a very haphazard way. Sources note that with the exception of Boss Game Studio's *Spider*, all projects signed by the U.S. studio before Traeger came on board were killed.

If the information surrounding the pre-Traeger acquisitions is accurate, it's fairly obvious BMG had already spent a fair amount of money on products that would never see daylight. According to sources, this practice created bad blood between Moses and BMG Interactive Europe — the U.S. and Europe were splitting development costs, and the poor deals Moses was shaking hands on in the States weren't making him any friends at BMG overseas.

While the bicoastal division of the North America operation created its own set of problems, Traeger says that "the thing that was really dysfunctional about the BMG situation was Europe. The two [international divisions] seemed very competitive with each other. European entertainment was headed by Rudy Gassner, and the interactive unit was [and is still] headed by Gary Dale. Aside from the dysfunction that existed in North America, there was never a real cohesive worldwide interactive strategy. From day one, it was a very dysfunctional organization."

Still, Traeger is quick to compliment the European operation, noting how impressed he was with Dale's ability to quickly build a distribution organization. "Europe was doing the kind of things in distribution that GT was doing over here in the States," Traeger says. "It was pretty obvious to all of us that the interactive business for BMG Europe, especially from a sales and distribution side, seemed to be a much more strategic piece of business than it seemed in North America."

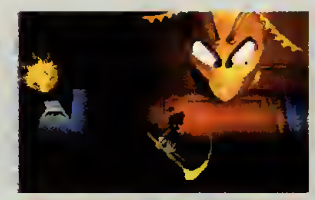
The whole North American division of BMG Interactive would probably have been better run if it had been under the direct control of Europe. But that wasn't going to happen — the president of

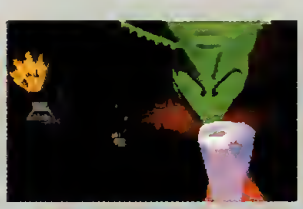
Project Name.

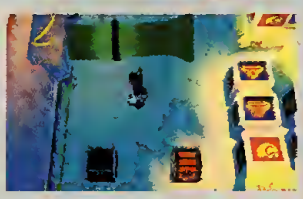
Monkey Hero

Format:	PlayStation
New Publisher:	Take 2
Developer:	Blam!
Release Date:	June 1998

Perhaps the most inspiring of the remaining crop of former BMG titles, *Monkey Hero* takes PlayStation games in a refreshingly different direction, with a top-down, action/RPG similar to the 16-bit *Legend of Zelda*. The project was started by two former Crystal Dynamics employees, Jay Minn and Jeronimo Barrera, whose story inspiration came directly from the Chinese folktale Monkey. As the staff-wielding Monkey, players must explore several kingdoms to retrieve stolen pieces of a magic book. While the game world is built in 3D, the characters are prerendered sprites that maintain a very chubby and likable anime style. At last count, the game featured somewhere between 3,000 and 3,500 screens, more than 30 enemies, 16 dungeons, and 14 bosses. Besides English, the company is localizing the text into Japanese, French, High German, and Italian.







***Monkey Hero* pits players against an odd variety of bosses**

BMG Entertainment North America, Strauss Zelnick, former president of Crystal Dynamics, was not about to give up his new interactive baby.

Traeger points to this as a defining moment in the company's short-lived history. When BMG decided to beef up its interactive effort, he says, it split control of the division between Zelnick and Gassner, both of whom wanted ultimate authority. "The day they decided to split the interactive business [between the U.S. and Europe] and look at it as two separate entities," says Traeger, "was the day that it was doomed to fail."

Still, after months of setting up deals with developers, the first (and last) product to ship under the BMG Interactive label in the U.S. was ready to go out the door. It was late February '97, and *Spider* was ready for PlayStation. While *Spider* was hardly the title to launch a division on (it was a solid, but not extraordinary platformer, which received three stars in **NG 28**), the main problem was with the distribution, which was still not in place. Traeger estimates that the title only got 40% of the distribution it would have gotten had it gone through an established publisher. "The philosophy that I had always heard," says former BMG Producer Ken Rogers, "was BMG thought it would be able to piggyback off its music distribution ... Don really tried to fight them on that."

While *Spider* was barely hanging on in retail, Delphine's *Moto Racer* for PC was getting ready in the wings. The early word was that the arcade-style motorcycle racing game was dynamite (it received five stars in **NG 31**). But BMG's PC distribution was in even worse shape than its console side. In what can only be described as pure corporate panic, BMG Entertainment's decision on how to solve the distribution problem was to simply pull the plug on the East Coast sales force and wash its hands of the entire interactive division in the U.S. — without even notifying members of the West Coast office.

On April 15, Jay Moses resigned from the company, and on April 22, human resources came in from New York to offer severance packages to about 15 North American studio employees. When

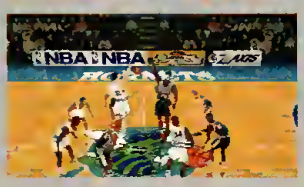
***Spider* (right) was the only title ever published by BMG Interactive North America. BMG's next game, *Moto Racer* (a far better title), was sold to EA. A *Moto Racer* sequel is due later this year**

Project Name:

Fox Sports College Hoops '99

Format	N64
New Publisher	Fox Interactive
Developer	Z-Axis
Release Date	Fall 1998

Once upon a time, this title was going to be the first NBA game for Nintendo 64. Former BMG Vice President Don Traeger had negotiated a licensing deal with the NBA, which unlike the game, was nontransferable. With Fox Interactive now at the licensing helm, the game now uses the NCAA license and has received an artistic face-lift Yet, *College Hoops* brings with it the same key gameplay innovations it had as a pro game — namely, the "fake" feature, which enables players (with a push of a button) to make a fake shot, or fake-step in one direction and move in another, as well as the "talk" feature, which enables players to call plays and "smack talk" an opponent. Recent additions to the game include an increased memory size and optimization to run in high-res



These shots are from the old, NBA version of the game

Moses left the company, he allegedly received a fairly large severance package and was off to Europe for a long vacation. One former BMG employee has mentioned to **Next Generation** that some workers are still in a legal battle with BMG over their compensation packages. Yet despite the looming layoffs, in a story posted April 23, 1997 on **Next Generation Online**, Europe's Gary Dale asserted that no one had been laid off, as the company might secure an affiliate label or distribution deal with another company. How did Producer Ken Rogers hear his office was shutting down? From one of his developers, who had heard from Dale that it was being closed.

Whether or not BMG even considered an affiliate relationship is questionable. "We had meetings with Electronic Arts," Traeger explains. "They were interested and we could have worked something out, but [BMG corporate] wouldn't even bring it up for discussion."

And what if BMG Entertainment hadn't decided to shut down its interactive division? "I think if they [Traeger and Suarez] would have been able to act out their plan," says one developer, "this would have been their year. They'd be dominating at this point."

Divided they fell

Did the people involved in the San Francisco studio feel betrayed? You bet.

"I don't think that we had a lot of champions within the BMG universe to begin with," says one former employee. "A lot of people in high places had no clue what the interactive business was about, nor did they necessarily care."

"There's an element of the traditional Hollywood/New York media way of doing business that I find reprehensible"

Don Traeger, former BMG VP of global product development

Many accuse Zelnick for turning his back on the group. "I'm surprised he's still there," says a source close to the company. "I can't believe he survived this whole thing. I think he did it by not managing to take responsibility for any of this ... Moses — he was the [well-deserved] fall guy."

There is much speculation as to what factors finally triggered the shuttering of BMG Interactive. Clearly, BMG underestimated the difficulty of securing distribution. On top of that, BMG's corporate moneymen apparently didn't recognize that the company was sitting on a number of potential hits and thus were unwilling to continue with a project that would require more investment before a substantial return was realized. In short, BMG Entertainment lacked the guts to continue. We'll never know for sure, though, as BMG declined to comment for this story, citing an unwillingness to discuss "internal company business."

Many involved with the short-lived project also suggest that some of BMG's problems stemmed from the inability of the New York/Hollywood insiders and the Silicon Valley community to communicate on a genuine level and show mutual respect. "There's an element of the traditional Hollywood/New York media way of doing business that I find reprehensible," Traeger says. "They don't rock the boat, they wear really nice suits, and go to the Grammies. That's their life." (Ironically, during one of **Next Generation**'s several unsuccessful attempts to contact Zelnick regarding this article, an assistant in his office informed us: "Mr. Zelnick's been very busy with the Grammies this past week.")

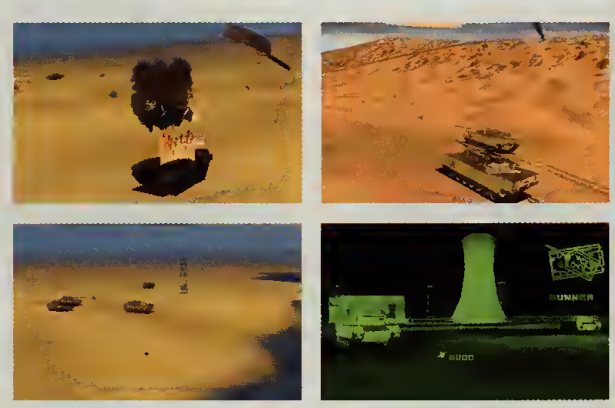
In the end, however, it was New York that had the final say. And when the business refused to grow in the mold of a record company, it was

Project Name

SpearHead

Format	PC
New Publisher	I-Magic
Developer:	Zombie/MAK Tech.
Release Date	May 1998

It seems only fitting that I-Magic, a leading publisher of military sim games, acquired the rights to publish *SpearHead*, an M1A2 tank simulator. As a joint effort between MAK Technologies and Zombie, it's doubtful that any other tank sim development team has as much experience building true military simulators. Zombie Producer John Williamson and MAK President Warren Katz have collectively spent years working with the military's SimNet, the armed forces network of training systems. In fact, the networking protocols used in *SpearHead* come from a program MAK developed for the Air Force. Beyond the very realistic gameplay, the graphics in this Tunisia-based combat game look fantastic with accelerator support. All we can say is, good luck surviving the 50 single-player and 20 multiplayer missions when the game ships next month.



***SpearHead*'s 3D accelerator support makes for a good-looking tank sim**

disposed of. "There were a lot of old-timers at BMG in the music distribution side," says one former studio employee, "who weren't going to listen to a bunch of young kids trying to teach them about the high technology business."

"We would have been glad," says Traeger, "relieved, welcome, to have more of a startup feel [at BMG Interactive] that engendered teamwork and strategy. Instead, it was nice office furniture and views of the Bay. That aspect of it was very surreal — very foreign to how we do business here. And it made me think ... 'It's us against them.' I much prefer the business style and the more sincere efforts of the Silicon Valley way of doing business."

And since BMG's corporate personnel didn't want to hear what the interactive studio had to say, it should come as no surprise that the studio employees were less than impressed with the middle-management aspects of the music end. "BMG had presidents like VPs of banks," says one studio employee. "They didn't have the kind of clout and authority that one would think."

One joke that was often tossed around among staff at the studio was that an associate producer at EA had more decision-making authority than a president of BMG. "It's frustrating," Traeger says in retrospect, "because BMG had the resources to compete with anyone, including EA, easily on the distribution side if they really wanted to go after it. They just couldn't or wouldn't."

The **remains** of the **games**

While political wars were being waged internally, the individual developers contracted to make games for BMG couldn't do anything more than ride out the storm. The people at the San Francisco studio may have gotten the proverbial shaft, but most of the developers came out fairly unscathed.

"I can't complain one bit about working with BMG," says Z-Axis President David Luntz. "They honored all contracts and funded both my projects to completion." Traeger had set up two sports projects with Z-Axis, including a soccer title and what was originally going to be the first NBA game for Nintendo 64. To BMG's credit, Luntz points out that for the most part, the company did honor development commitments and helped with funding until another publisher was found.

It wasn't all pretty, though. Traeger points to New Level Software's *Courier Crisis*, which was quickly licensed to GT Interactive and pushed out the door in a rough state. "If we had continued to be involved in that project," Traeger declares, "I think we would have made a decision to either spend another year on it or just shut it down."

Traeger accomplished what he could in the short time he remained with the company after the studio was killed. But many of the developers credit the European office with a

Rest in peace ...

BMG Interactive was still securing deals for new games and was even rumored to be in the middle of negotiating a major sports licensing deal with Nike when the division shut down. Here's some of what the corporate bean-counters denied the mass of gamers

Project: **Unnamed golf game**
Format: **PC/PlayStation**
Developer: **EAI**

Status: **Killed after five months**

What did we miss?

"We had worked on a golf project before joining EAI," says Bryan Brandenburg, EAI's senior director of interactive software. "We had a pretty robust 3D design based on EAI's DirectModel capabilities. We wanted to leverage like 100 man years worth of 3D experience in this product, so across the board we could beat *Links*, which was our target." Brandenberg notes his team had delivered several milestones that demonstrated a realtime 3D engine and a ball point-of-view, and even had a working ball physics. Currently, the technology is being repurposed for several undisclosed projects.

Project: **Kill Team**
Format: **PlayStation/Saturn/PC**
Developer: **Boss**

Status: **Killed after nearly a year, counting time spent in concept stages**

Project Name:

Three Lions
(formerly Major League Soccer)

Format:	PC/PlayStation
New Publisher:	Take 2
Developer	Z-Axis
Release Date:	TBA

Now officially the game of the English national team, *Three Lions* was at one point destined to be *Major League Soccer* in the U.S. The game will also be distributed throughout Europe by BMG under several localized titles. But with no real signs of *Major League Soccer* taking the country by storm, it is entirely possible that this game may never see a publishing deal in the U.S. — odd in that the game was developed in California. It would be a shame to miss an opportunity to play the game in the States, given the level of dedication Z-Axis convinces **Next Generation** it has put into improving soccer gameplay.

Excellent motion capture animation makes *Three Lions* a contender

What did we miss?
"Not much," remarks Boss VP of Development Colin Gordon. Gordon explains it was more of a mutual decision to put a stop to this project. A mission-based shooter with five selectable characters, Kill Team featured some side-scrolling character action, some driving action, and several 3D mini-games in a dark, futuristic world. "Sometimes you get into a project," says Gordon, "and it gets hard. This one really needed re-evaluation." In an interesting aside, Gordon explains he first pitched what became *Top Gear Rally* to BMG, which the company passed on.

Project: **Vox Apocalypse**
Format: **PC**
Developer: **Zombie**

Status: **Killed after three months**

What did we miss?
Zombie co-founder Mark Long describes the game as a "3D RPG with a really dark, gothic look and feel to it — imagine *The Crow* as a game." In an effort to bring very high production values to the game, Long says *Vox Apocalypse* was going to be a $10 million project. "BMG kept calling it their French foreign film," Long says. Team members included the top designer of Magic: the Gathering card game, the art director from Wizards of the Coast; Mark Morgan, who composed the music for *Zork Nemesis*; and a top programmer from London, whose green card was revoked when the project was canceled.

tremendous save. Both Jay Minn of Blam! and Mark Long of Zombie mention a fantastic effort on the part of Europe's developer relations man, Sam Hauser, to secure the future of the games that BMG Interactive U.S. commissioned.

And the fate of BMG Europe? It was sealed just as this story was going to press, when news of an acquisition by growth-hungry Take 2 Interactive broke on March 12. This came only a week after Traeger told **Next Generation** that BMG Europe needed to find "a solution" in the next year, implying that it was only a matter of time before Europe would get the ax. The Take 2 acquisition comes as a bit of a surprise, though, given that BMG Europe has swapped publishing rights to several titles with ASC, and rumors of a merger had been circulating for several months.

Interestingly, though, Take 2 Interactive and ASC have entered into a joint distribution deal to publish DMA's *Grand Theft Auto*, and it wouldn't surprise us if a Take 2/ASC merger occurred later this summer. Take 2 has also reached a joint publishing deal with Ripcord Games for the *Spec Ops* title. And the payoff for Sam Hauser? He gets to keep working on his projects, only now from the New York City headquarters of Take 2 Interactive — a good move for him, as many European game industry employees long for the higher-paying jobs in the U.S.

So just how hard was BMG hit when it closed its North American interactive office? Several former employees have estimated the loss to be between 15 and 30 million dollars, an amount one source shrugs off as "a drop in the bucket for them." How much Take 2 paid for the remains of the BMG lineup has not been disclosed, but certainly it's not enough to recoup the amount BMG Entertainment had invested in the interactive business.

As for Traeger, he now heads up his own production studio and is already knee-deep in game making again. Many of his former BMG co-workers have gone back to more secure, traditional publishers. And Traeger no longer feels threatened by media forces from beyond the borders of Silicon Valley. "I guess my thought was either fight them or join them," he sighs, "and I joined them. That was hopefully the last time, you know? I don't think they get it. I don't think they really ever will."

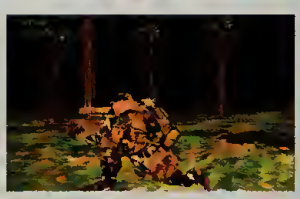
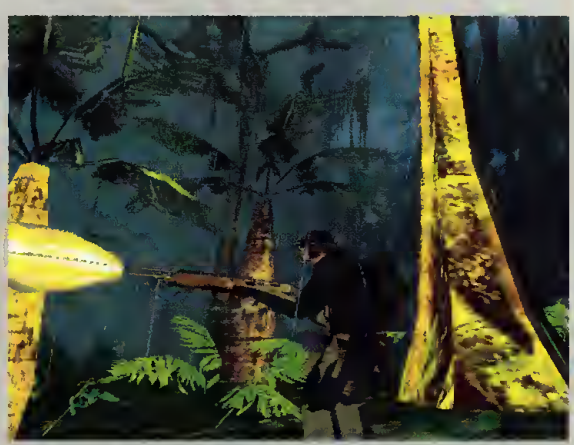
In the end, the lesson is clear. BMG's experience taught the world that it takes more than money and success in other areas of media to win in the game business. And sometimes, it even takes more than having great games. If companies want to be successful, they need to do more than hire great people — they need to listen to them, too. Considering how fast the game industry is growing, it is inevitable that other mega media companies, smelling dollars, will join the pack. Hopefully, though, they will learn from BMG's mistakes.

Project Name.

Spec Ops:
Rangers Lead the Way

Format:	PC
New Publisher:	Panasonic/Ripcord Games
Developer:	Zombie
Release Date:	May 1998

Looking back at **Next Generation**'s first preview of *Spec Ops* in the June '97 issue (**NG 30**), at first glance, people might think they were looking at a *Goldeneye* preview. Some say when this special forces "sim" offering covert action in exterior environments missed its Christmas window for the PC, it lost too much ground. But Zombie co-founder Mark Long, an admitted *Goldeneye* junkie, believes his game will one-up that title, with its seven scopes, including night vision, thermal, 2X, laser pointer, and "all kinds of stuff." Considering its Voodoo^2 compatibility and the amount of work the team put into the project (including using an ex-Army ranger as a consultant), *Spec Ops* remains a title to watch for.

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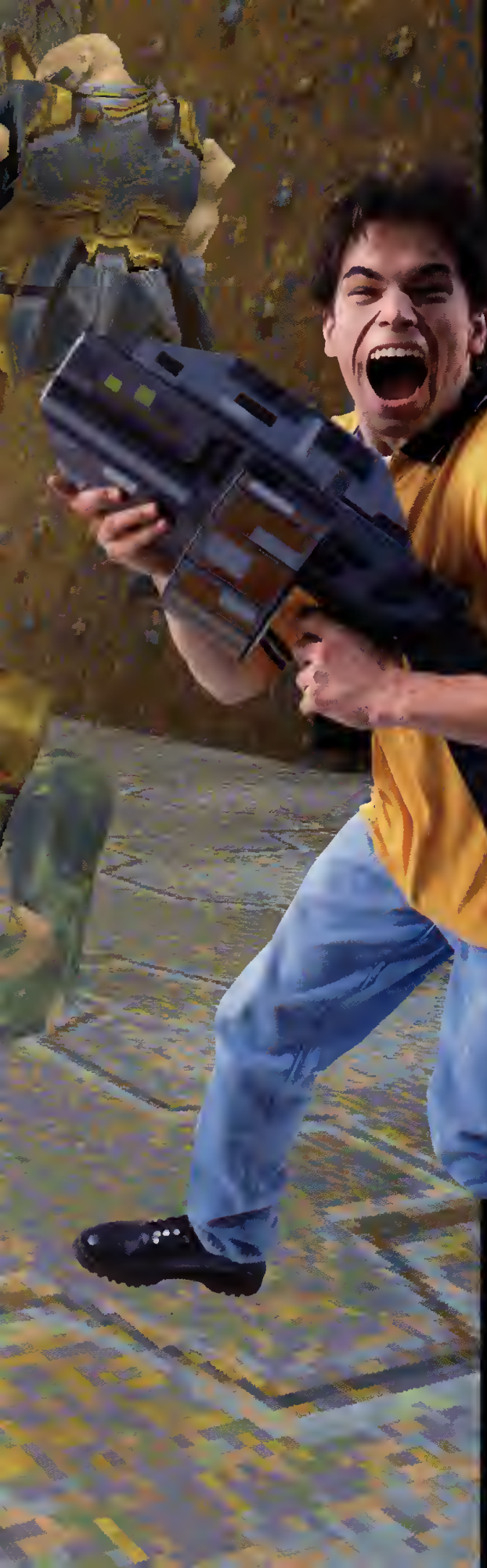

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HARD-CORE

Tales of the hardcore

When **Next Generation** asked readers to submit their hardcore gaming stories, the response was a bit overwhelming, if not a little frightening. What follows is definitive proof that **Next Generation** readers are the hardest of the hardcore

After reading hundreds of pages of hardcore stories, we've come to one conclusion: Maybe Senator Lieberman was right.

In February, we asked for your best hardcore gaming stories. We were amazed by the level of response. The letters seem to bear out what we've always believed about our readers. For some, games are [illegible] and death. But for you, our readers, [illegible] more important than that. When you're truly hardcore, games — the best ones, anyway — are more important than school, work responsibilities, sleep, or even threats of physical violence.

That said, even we were surprised by the lengths [illegible] some people have gone to in pursuit of their [illegible]on — from running kid brothers over with bikes to committing felony theft to get arcade tokens (yes, Matt, stealing from your church's collection plate is wrong). Some of the stories are scary, but more are inspirational. Perhaps nothing sums up everything that makes gaming so important better than that feeling you get when you look up from the game you were planning on playing "for one more level," only to see the light of dawn coming through the window. The lengths that some [illegible] are willing to go to get games — eight-hour [illegible]ips to the mall, rollerblading from Manhattan to [illegible] — make us realize just how important gaming is to our lives. But more so, many stories we received about both impromptu and planned tournaments, competitions, and to-the-death duels demonstrate that gaming, despite what the mainstream media may say, is ultimately a very social activity.

We have always made (and will always make) the kind of magazine we would want to read ourselves, and the passion that came across in the letters we received is ultimately no less than what we expected. Anyway, enough with the mushy stuff, on to the stories. One final note: We received far too many entries to print, but based on the level of response, starting with the [illegible]e, we'll be printing the best hardcore story we receive each month.

3,000 miles for an NES

I became an "official" gamer at roughly the same time my father purchased and built our first computer, the Timex Sinclair ZX-81 with the 16K RAM add-on board, thermo-ink printer, cassette player, and *Frogger*, the first game ever made for this machine. All this when I was only five years old. Since then, I was the first on my block to get the Atari 2600, the Vic 20, and Commodore 64, and even some hand-built games that my father built using Radio Shack parts and mail-order chips in homemade wooden cabinets.

The truest test of my hardcoreness came in spring of 1985, after the big crash. That was when I found out about the NES. My father and I called every single retail shop around to no avail. Determined, I tried calling my friends in my hometown of Portland, Oregon, and, to my surprise, there was a stash of NES "Control Packs" at the local Toys "R" Us (without sales tax, I might add).

A few weeks later — on my 10th birthday — I got exactly what I wanted: a plane ticket to Portland (I was in North Carolina then), solely to purchase the NES for my very own. I mowed lawns for about three weeks to get the $89.99 (plus snack money) for my one-week stay in Oregon. I remember, very clearly, how quickly I was able to type the word "Nintendo" in my numerous letters to friends in Portland.

Carl Scripter, carl@ipinc.net

Uh, right

I'm so hardcore I like to carve pictures of Sonic and Mario into my flesh with a razor blade, then jump into a bathtub filled with rubbing alcohol so I can suffer for their sins.

Anonymous

OK, we don't really buy that one, but it is pretty funny.

Cheater

I was super-excited when I heard about the *Star Fox* competition Toys "R" Us was having, only to be crushed when I found out my family would be driving to Disney on the big day. I woke up extra early that morning and went to Toys "R" Us and won a T-shirt. I then made my parents stop at every Toys "R" Us on the way to Orlando (from Miami). I won five T-shirts and got two jackets. I almost cried when I got to one store and saw that someone had a better score than me.

Airtrix4@aol.com

An argument for child locks

I played my first arcade game when I was three years old (some obscure top-down racing game). From that moment on I was hooked. Anytime I saw an arcade, I had to go in and play (or I would have a tantrum). Anyway, when I was six, my mother and I pulled into McDonalds to buy me a kid's meal. They were giving away Ronald McDonald drinking glasses with each one. Now it just so happened that there was an arcade across the street from the McDonalds. I asked my mom if we could go to the arcade, but she said no. I went into my usual crying routine, but it wasn't working that day, so I decided to take matters into my own hands. My mother pulled out of the McDonalds drive-up, crossed one lane of traffic, and pulled into the turning lane to wait for an opportunity to merge. As she made the turn, I saw the arcade and decided it was the right time, so I opened the car door and was promptly flung from the car. I was holding the kid's meal glass, so as I hit the ground, I dropped it and it shattered. The traffic was swerving around me and my mom was completely nuts trying to get out of the car and get to me. I was sitting on the ground crying because I broke my glass and I couldn't get through the traffic to the arcade while my mom was grabbing me and crying because we were going to die in the street. My mom still says that was the worst moment of her life. Now I have my own car ...

Christopher Marx, themarx@neosoft.com

So I **opened the car door** and was promptly **flung from the car**

Christopher Marx

Jumping out of a moving vehicle to go to an arcade? OK, you win.

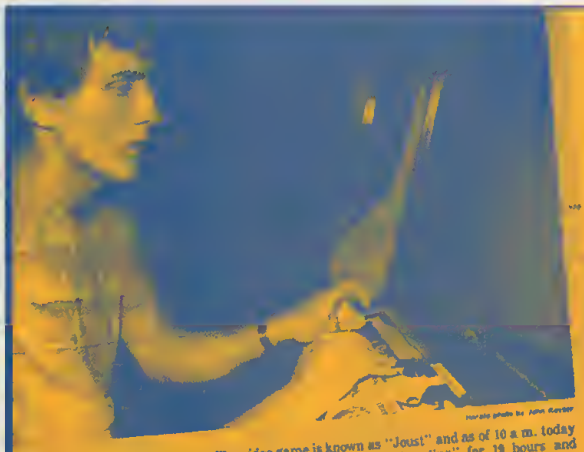
The haunting of Hill House

As a budding videogame collector in 1985, with five systems and a respectable number of games, I wanted a way to show off my collection and bring in new people to play games. What I came up with was an evening devoted entirely to videogames, with a multiplayer competition and gold-painted joystick as a trophy for the winner thrown in for good measure.

Being in the Army's Quartermaster Officer advanced course, I had the perfect group to invite: school-bored Army officers. Needless to say, the first event came close to turning into a riot, complete with military police involvement. It was also loads of fun and a great success, and I was encouraged to turn it into an annual event.

Since then there have been 12 more Hill Videogame Invitationals. The competition started in Petersburg, Virginia; moved to Wiesbaden, West Germany; and has since resided in Knoxville, Tennessee. It has drawn groups of as few as eight and as many as 35. With 60+ systems and more than 1,350 games, the choices of systems to play and games for competition have gotten more difficult, but I can usually pare it down to under 10 systems.

I like to think I've brought many adult gamers to the hobby simply by exposing them to what



The video game is known as "Joust" and as of 10 a.m. today Keith Hutchins, 16, had been "jousting" for 19 hours and showing no sign slowing down. Hutchins stuck his quarter in the machine at 3 p.m. Sunday and has continued playing on the same coin, three cups of coffee and a Snickers bar ever since. He is attempting to break the game's national record of 68 million and, avoiding some unforseen breakdown (of either the machine or himself), he should do just that. According to Jeff Harter, the owner of Lazer I where the game is being played, Hutchins is averaging about 10 million points every three hours.

Almost videod-out

Joust

In 1982, as a junior in high school, I played *Joust* for 25 hours on one token. I know it's lame, but I found out how to use the "Pterodactyl" bug to play indefinitely. I missed a day of school to set the "record" of time. I did nothing but kill pterodactyls almost the entire time.

I became quite a celebrity in town (population 25,000). During Christmas vacation later that year, a buddy and I played a doubles game for an entire week, taking eight-hour shifts. Sometimes I still hear the sound of pterodactyls screeching as I thrust a joust down their throats.

Sometime that next year, I played *Q*bert* for 38 hours on one token. I started to hallucinate, so I utilized a bug that would "hang" the game (I just wanted to quit). Thirty minutes after leaving, the arcade owner called to say the game had returned to normal. He wanted me to finish trying to set the record (good publicity for him). I declined and promptly went to sleep. Sorry, I don't have any news clips of this. The town was getting pretty bored with all this "videogame" stuff.

Keith Hutchins, Bellevue, Nebraska

It may not sound like the most challenging game, but it was the "challenge" that made one hardcore gamer play through *Phantasmagoria* in one sitting

Phantasmagoria

Last year, a kid in my dorm got *Phontosmogorio*. He told me the game was incredibly hard, and it was one of the best games he'd played in a long time. I watched him play it for about five minutes and disagreed. I told him I didn't think it looked hard at all and I could beat it in a day. He said, "Oh yeah?" Of course, that meant that now I had to do it.

The next day (Saturday) I woke up around 11 a.m. and started the game from the beginning. I played it nonstop for 13 hours. I was supposed to go out with my friends and meet up with some girls, but I turned them down. I ordered Domino's delivery for lunch and dinner from a phone next to the computer. I had someone else go down and get the pizza at the front door for me. I only got up to answer nature's call.

The thing of it is, I hated the game. I spent the whole time complaining about how *Phontosmogorio* was terrible, and I couldn't understand how anyone could play such a game. But the fact of the matter is, it was all worth it just to see the look on that kid's face when I beat it 13 hours later.

Freshair, freshair@clarityconnect.com

videogames have to offer in a social environment. It still gives me great pleasure to show off my ever-growing collection each year, but it gives me even more pleasure to share something I enjoy so much.

Jayson Hill, jlhill@ix.netcom.com

What earthquake?

My little brother was at home in Menlo Park, California, when the huge Loma Prieta earthquake hit in 1989. He was playing *Mega Mon 2* on the NES (which he had just recently gotten for his birthday). Being engrossed in the final Dr. Wily Stage, he did not even notice the earthquake until 30 seconds into it, when the power went out. It was only at that point that he looked up in surprise and frustration and asked, "What happened?"

Jordan Maynard, maynard@rohan.sdsu.edu

But no Space Orb

Here's how much of a hardcore *Quoke* player I am. I was in a motorcycle accident on July 5 of last year and badly broke both of my arms (left arm-forearm cast, right arm-full cast). After I was out of the hospital for a week, I could take it no more and needed to frag some fellow Quakers. I couldn't use my left hand properly to maneuver because of the cast, so I used a long shoelace to tie my keyboard to the side of my computer's towercase, mapped one of my mouse buttons to cycle the weapons, propped my left arm up with a folded towel, downed some painkillers, and off I went. Funny thing was, I was still pretty good, only my aim was a little off. I loved taunting those below me on the frag list, saying they got beat by a guy with two broken arms!

Lance Brooks, lbrooks@post.kosone.com

Hardcore, or stupid?

Believe it or not, while at the electronics section in Wal-Mart, I witnessed two adults engaged in a heated argument (that almost resulted in a brawl) over which man would take home the store's last Nintendo 64 copy of *Wor Gods*.

Mike and Margie Fraser, mandm@rconnect.com

Neccessity is the ...

Hardcore gaming circa 1981. My brother and I had been swapping victories and trash talk playing *Pele Soccer* for the Atari VCS all day, when the shoot button on my controller breaks. Fifteen minutes later we're back up, using a Chapstick cap, spring, and a marble as the new button mechanism. Of course, I go on a win streak of four in a row and lay into my brother heavy, who demands to have the "enhanced" joystick. We switch, he wins the next two games, and we bust open the "good" joystick to enhance it with the same Chapstick firing mechanism to level the playing field. We played until our fingers blistered!

Mark Zona, Mark_Zona@hp.com

Slow theft

I used to steal from my mother's penny jar. I'd tell myself, "Only 25¢," take the 25 pennies to the local store that had a few games, and trade them for a quarter. I'd play the game, then afterwards I'd just HAVE to play again, so I'd bike back home and steal another 25 pennies.

Rabies, rabies@globalserve.net

The damage 25¢ can do

When I was growing up, the Space Station Arcade was where I spent the majority of my free time. During summer vacations, I was there so often that when my friends wanted to find me, they would come to the Space Station before checking my house. Back in the winter of 1983, the schools were closed because of a horrible Michigan blizzard and a 20° wind chill. It was so cold outside that the news stations were warning people not to leave their houses unless it was absolutely necessary.

My friend Kevin was over that day. We were tired of all the games on my Colecovision, and my parents wouldn't allow my friends to play games on our precious Apple II Plus, so we decided that we had to find a way to get to the Space Station. We tried to get my mom to take us there, but she refused to drive. After arguing with her for about an hour, we told her that we were going to go play out in the snow. Instead, we walked the four miles to the Space Station. Hours later, we called my mom from the Space Station. She was more than willing

I'd just HAVE to play again, so I'd bike back home and **steal another 25 pennies**

Rabies

to drive through the blizzard to pick us up rather than letting us walk home.

A few years later, my dad became the tax lawyer for the owner of the Space Station. He went to my dad to handle the sale of the arcade. During the meeting, he angrily told my dad that the reason he was selling the Space Station was "because people like your son make the business unprofitable. When he plays for an hour on one quarter, he ties up the machines, and I can't make any money."

Raymond W. Rowe, rwredr@earthlink.net

Desire fulfilled

I was really excited for the release of the *Secret of Monkey Island*. I knew the general release date from the magazines, but I wasn't sure when my local software store would receive it. So I made a habit of calling them up every single day. After about a week, the guy at the store got pissed off and said, "Look, DON'T CALL EVERY DAY, call once a week or so." But I needed to know so badly that I got my friends to start calling for me, and I even faked a change in my voice once or twice. Eventually, the guy at the store told me that the game was due to come in that day, so I waited outside the store in the morning. The clerk arrived, and I waited as he checked the boxes in the back of the store. He came out empty-handed. Sadly, I waited around for a few minutes, just when a deliveryman walked in the door. He said something to the effect of, "Oh, you guys forgot to pick up this box" and handed it over. I knew it was the *Secret of Monkey Island* -- some gut feeling. The clerk signed for it, then tore it open with the exacto knife, revealing at least 10, shiny, laminated copies of the game. It was literally the BEST feeling I have ever felt in my life.

robin@videogamedesign.com

Falling out, online

My longtime friend and neighbor got me addicted to *Ultima Online* about two months ago. He and I would play through marathon sessions, sometimes as long as 20 hours on the weekends. If we got split up during the game, we would run next door to each other's house to get our bearings, regardless of time of day, rain, sleet, or extreme cold. Sometimes he and I would go to work with an hour or less of sleep, come home, and start playing again.

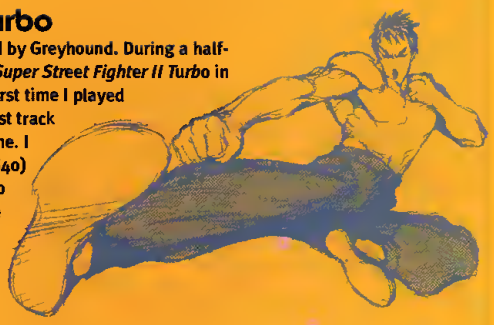
Well one day we decided to chip in and buy a dragon boat so we could go to the outer islands of Britannia. He put up about 800 GP and I covered the other 2500. By the time we got the damn boat in the water, it was time for me to go to work. Since it was my buddy's day off, he wanted to take the boat and go exploring. I wasn't about to let him, since the boat was mostly mine and I wanted to go exploring when I got off. We got into one hell of an argument over who was going to take the stupid boat and when. We actually drew our weapons on each other and began to duke it out right there, online. We stopped short of killing each other, and my friend got off the boat and huffed off into the woods. We didn't talk to each other for a full month after the melee. The moral to the story is: Friends may come and go, but large capital investments in Britannia are forever, or something.

Rolando Correa, ramjack@bellsouth.net

Street Fighter II Turbo

I visited my parents one weekend by Greyhound. During a half-hour rest stop, I started playing *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* in the restaurant lobby. It was the first time I played this version of *Street Fighter*. I lost track of time and the bus left without me. I had to purchase another ticket ($40) to get to my parent's house. I also scanned, resized, and printed the covers and instructions of all my old PlayStation games and put them into jewel cases.

Louis Kim



Street Fighter III

When *Street Fighter III* debuted, everyone in my area was playing it. I didn't get to play much that first day. The next morning I showed up at the arcade right before opening. Then when the doors opened, I ran to the *SFIII* machine and quickly slapped on an OUT OF ORDER sign. After I got my tokens, I ran back to the machine, which was now left abandoned, and began to play!

epsilon9@earthlink.net

Getting a chance to play *Street Fighter III* sometimes requires a little deception

Street Fighter II

How about this for hardcore gaming! When *Street Fighter II* for Super NES was released, it was very difficult and very expensive to acquire. I ended up selling my Plasma at two clinics across town from each other for the money and driving 250 miles from Houston to Corpus Christi, Texas, because a mall on Corpus had it and they were willing to hold it for me for five hours. I left at three, got there at 8:30, and got back to Houston at one in the morning so that I could get up at five to go to school.

Vincent Horrillo

One hardcore gamer gave up Plasma and drove more than 200 miles to secure his copy of *Street Fighter II*

Two PlayStations and 24 hours later ...

I think my biggest marathon session was the weekend *VondolHeorts* came out. I took it over to my friend Jamus' apartment, and we started playing at around 10 p.m. Friday night. Saturday at noon, I brain-locked out, and my friend Matt took over, who played till around 10 on Saturday, at which point we beat the game the FIRST time. By this point we had attracted a crowd of about five of our friends, who wanted to see the first half of the game. So, we started over, the five other friends rotating the controller with every fight (somewhere in this time I fell asleep for a few hours).

At about noon on Sunday, we noticed the sound was not only skipping, but the game was having weird multisecond hangs. At about 1, Jamus' PlayStation died, never to return. We basically overheated it to the point of melting (and we learned our lesson about never putting your PS on the carpet). Did that stop us? Heck, no! Matt went and got HIS PlayStation (I wasn't stupid enough to put my PS on the line), and we kept on playing through Sunday night, on through Monday till Monday evening, when we had not only beaten the game AGAIN, but we had started to go on Ash's Vandalier quest.

What stopped us? Jamus' roommate came back with his girlfriend and shut the PlayStation off so he could watch a movie with his girlfriend. We somehow managed not to kill him, especially after seeing a good 1,000 jugular sprays in *VondolHeorts* ...

SABrasel@aol.com

B&E and FFIII

This is my definition of hardcore gaming: My friend and I got into *FFIII*, we were in the last cave, about to beat the game after 25 long hours. But I needed to go to a baseball team meeting that day, so I left with the promise that I could be there when the game was beaten. When I got home, my friend called me and told me all about the ending of the game. I couldn't believe it. He beat the game without me. Just when I was starting to hang the phone up, he told me that he was going to Texas and wouldn't be back for two weeks. Perfect. Two or three hours after he left, I went into his house and "borrowed" his Super NES and the game. I started a new game and without saving, beat it.

5iCILiAqUe@aol.com

Koei's gonna love this one

In my American history class our midterm was on WWII. I postponed studying until the last minute. I couldn't concentrate on studying because I had been playing *Pocific Theoter of Operations* on my Genesis for the past couple of weeks. The day of the test came, and I was ill-prepared due to my addiction to this game. The test was in essay format, and there were only two questions. When I looked at the questions, the answers were from the introduction of *P.T.O.*! They were about who invaded the Dutch East Indies and when. I knew those from playing *P.T.O.* I ended up getting an A- on my midterm.

Theo Bryson, mrservon@email.msn.com

Where there is a computer, there are games

A few years ago, I was working the night shift for a dateline. The job essentially consisted of screening calls (so that teenage girls could not get on the live "chat" system) and creating and maintaining customer accounts. I was very bored between calls and desperately seeking a videogame to play. Unfortunately, there was no way to install games on the system, as the boxes had no disk drives, and the only games I eventually managed to find were the old sample QBasic games: *Snoke* and *Gorillo* (and I could not even play *Gorillo* since the monitors were monochrome). I showed the other employees how to get past the security and get into DOS to load the snake game so that they could start practicing in order for me to have decent two-player games.

Needless to say, the "snake.bas" game got boring real fast. While trying to find other games on the network I might have missed (in my experience there is always at least one game) and finding nothing, I remembered my boss' computer ... She had an early Pentium with a color monitor and Windows 3.1! I was bored to the point that the prospect of playing *Solitoire* or *Minesweeper* sounded pretty good. At least good enough for me to break into her office. (I used the credit card trick. This was the first and only time I've ever managed to open a door with a plastic card. Actually it was several plastic cards because I broke a couple perfecting the trick.) My efforts were rewarded, though, since not only did she have *Solitoire* and *Minesweeper*, but she also had a copy of *Links*! Ahhh! The nights of bliss I had playing rounds of golf with my co-worker (I showed everyone the credit card trick, of course, so that they would not miss out when I was not working).

Thierry Plante, tplante@intergate.bc.ca

> I showed other employees **how to get past security to load the snake game**
>
> Thierry Plante

Let the wookie win

There are many, many times when my hobby of playing videogames has stretched to questionable lengths. But the one time my hobby put me in physical danger is a gem. Back in the day when *Mortol Kombot 3* was in the arcade, I was still into cheesy fighting games that relied heavily on button memorization. I was playing in a pool hall and this guy joins in. Fine, no big deal ... right? Wrong. This guy was horrible, hardly a match. I kept on beating him over and over again. His anger grew because any character I used, I made him look like a fool. Twenty dollars later (this went on for at least an hour), he started to swear at me, kicked my foot a few times, pushed me, and actually wanted to take things outside ... that's right, he wanted to kick my ass because I was cheap and was embarrassing him in front of his girlfriend (who wasn't amused by her boyfriend's childish behavior).

That's when things got out of hand. When this happened, I was 18 years old, 6'2", and no more than 160 pounds ... I was a rake. My short-tempered opponent, however, was at least 22 years old, at least 200 pounds, and mean-looking. He became so frustrated in losing that many times, he started screaming at me and started to punch the monitor. Maybe I should have let him win. Anyway, I started to back up and he thought I was going to make a break for it. This jerk actually started to run towards me. The chase led into the pool table area, where he proceeded to pick up balls from tables he passed and throw them at me. One ball soared just behind my head and shattered the glass frame of a car picture hanging on the wall. Thank god this place had a big bartender who saw the chase go down (all 10 seconds of it) and tackled my assailant. Needless to say, the bartender made sure that "Mr.Testosterone" wouldn't harass myself or the other patrons ever again. Strange, but true.

Terence Keisey, c/o trencher@idirect.com

> **His anger grew** because any character I used, **I made him look like a fool**
>
> Terence Keisey

An audience in Iowa

My brother Jimmy and his friend Blayne were pretty good at action games. One time, we went to the mall to do some shopping. As we were leaving, Blayne said that he wanted to go look at the games real quick. It was about two or so in the afternoon. Well, we went to the game store. And there they saw it: *Contra III*. Having just exhausted their funds, they could only stare at it through the protective glass case and only dream of owning it. I'll bet they stared for 10 minutes when the guy came over and said, "We have that game on demo, you can play it if you want." Blayne looked up: "Where?!?" There was a little kid playing it, and they made fun of him until he ran away, scared, I think. I was abruptly charged with taking their bags out to the car. They pretty much became one with the controller, and with the two-player simultaneous mode, were immediately good. Well, first, about two and a half hours later, they beat it. On normal.

Neither was satisfied, though, because each had read about the cool ending you got for beating it on hard in *EGM*. (That was before *EGM* took an unfortunate dive for the worst.) So, you can probably guess what happened next. THREE MORE HOURS ...

GRRRRR! I consider myself to have pretty good gaming endurance ... But five and a half hours, standing up even, with plastic things that immobilized the controllers. A crowd started to gather as they were about a third of the way through their final run to glory. At first it was just some teenagers, then a few "adults," and finally, a couple of girls. Sure, they weren't pretty, but you have to remember that this occurred in Iowa. Being the showmen that they are, Jim and Blayne put on a show all right, acting like it was the very first time that they had played, giving high fives, communicating in contra terminology and what-not. A perfect ending would have been a round of applause from the spectators, like in Disney's *Iron Will*, but they quietly left, obviously pleased and knowing that, somehow, everything was gonna turn out all right.

belldog@hotmail.com

E3 or bust

E3 before last, I was not yet in the gaming industry. Neither, for that matter, was my best friend Josh. He and I had met a year or two prior at San Francisco State, and we became friends when Josh discovered that I had recently purchased a 3DO machine. He was intrigued by the system and was very interested to see it in action. We discovered, through our discussions of 3DO, that we both had the desire to devote our lives to games, we just didn't know in what capacity. Neither of us had any ideas as to how to break into the industry. I mean, come on, what two people get here the same way?! Some people have undergraduate degrees, others have doctorates, while yet others have little more than high school diplomas. Needless to say, we were both at a loss for a course of action.

I remember months prior to that E3 trying desperately to somehow get tickets for myself and Josh so that we might attend, but I wasn't having any luck. I was working at a large consumer electronics chain selling computers, and although the employees there always got invites to the Winter CES, we did not seem to be on the list for E3. As time went on and E3 loomed ever nearer, it looked as though we wouldn't be able to go. The videogame gods must have been pulling for us, however, because just at the last minute, Josh somehow came up with invites! He had been working at, of all places, A TV/VCR repair shop in San Francisco, and for some reason THEY were on the list. I had to pretend I was an employee, but who cared? We were going to E3!

Bumped into bump and jump

When I was about 14, I had a paper route that passed by a local pizza place, which housed some cool games. I first saw *Defender, Joust,* and *Pac-Mon* in this place as I was growing up, and it became my local "hang" when I had my own money. One day my reactionist/religious mother informed me that I could no longer go down to the pizza place because she saw a news report on how videogame arcades demoralize our youth. Due to the violent nature of her rant, I thought it would be best to abide by her wishes for the time being.

Three days later, on the bus home from school, I heard that a few new games were in and one of them was "like playing a cartoon." I went down to the pizza place and saw through the window that the game being talked about was *Dragon's Lair*. I went in and began walking to the machine, when the world suddenly went black.

What happened was an elderly woman had mistakenly put her car into drive instead of reverse to get out of the parking lot and wound up coming through the glass window in the front. I was hit and thrown up against an old "Bump n' Jump" machine and was knocked out for a few seconds. When I came to, I took off running for home. When I arrived, my mother called me into the kitchen and asked where I had been. As I was telling her a story about delivering papers, she quietly handed me the phone. It was a police officer who arrived at the pizza place to report the accident. The other kids at the arcade knew who I was and told the cops my name. I received a lecture from the policeman about leaving the scene of a crime, and I also received a pummeling from my mother.

I was back the following week for the unveiling of the *Pac-Mon Jr.* and *Gountlet* machines.

Neal, neal@image.com

Despite a near-death experience and orders from his parents to stay away from the arcade, this hardcore gamer was back the following week, in time to see *Gauntlet*

That day that **Josh and I** got to spend **at E3 changed our lives**

Greg Vederman

One thing I had not done up to that point was to tell my professors that I needed to reschedule my finals in order to attend the show. So with a week to go before finals, I approached my kindly instructors with blatant lies. I told them all sorts of things depending on the professor. I told one that I needed surgery on my knee, I told another I had to go to a wedding in Florida. Anyway, I'm sure you get the idea. All of the ones that I lied to let me take my finals late ... The problem was that I had gotten a sudden burst of integrity in regards to one of my favorite profs and had told him the truth. Just when you think being a good person matters in this world, wouldn't you know it, he was the one person who wouldn't excuse me! On top of all that, the person who was supposed to cover my weekend shift at work had just gotten fired. Oh, and did I mention I was broke and couldn't even afford an airplane ticket? Talk about a disaster. The gods were obviously not quite as smitten with me as I had hoped.

So here's what finally ended up happening: Josh and I left after my closing shift at work on Saturday night and gassed up the ol' Ford Taurus (yes, I drive a grannymobile) and proceeded to drive to L.A. on the wrong freeway. Neither of us had ever made the drive before, so we decided we would go along the coast — couldn't be that much more out of the way, right? Well, 11 hours later (it would have taken six hours if we had taken the intelligent route), we were pulling into our motel. We only got the chance to sleep for a few hours before the show started the next day, and we had to drive back up north that same evening so I could be back for work on Monday, but you know what? I'd do it all again if I could. That day that Josh and I got to spend at E3 changed our lives. Never before had either of us been so awestruck. The site of *Mario 64* in action just about brought us to our knees, not to mention the slew of amazing PlayStation and PC titles that were in the works. We decided that we didn't care how we were going to do it, we would be WORKING at E3 the following year, not simply visiting.

Well, fast forward a year, and guess what happened? Josh got to work E3 ... and I didn't! But that was not altogether bad. As it turned out, Josh ended up graduating before me and had gotten a job at, of all places, 3DO. I forget what he started as, but he is now the Webmaster and has done some really great work for the company. I, on the other hand, lingered around in retail for a while longer, trying to decide when I would make my move. Right before this past Christmas, a position opened up at 3DO in the PR department, and Josh got me an interview. Needless to say, I am now writing my story from inside the 3DO offices, and later this year Josh and I WILL be working at E3 together.

When I think back to the days when Josh and I had discussions about 3DO over lunch in the cafeteria during college, it still amazes me that I'm here. I am in an industry that I love, at a company that I respect, and I am here with my best friend in the world. In this life, you just can't beat that.

Greg Vederman, 3DO public relations

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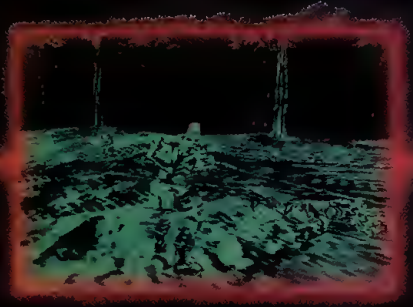
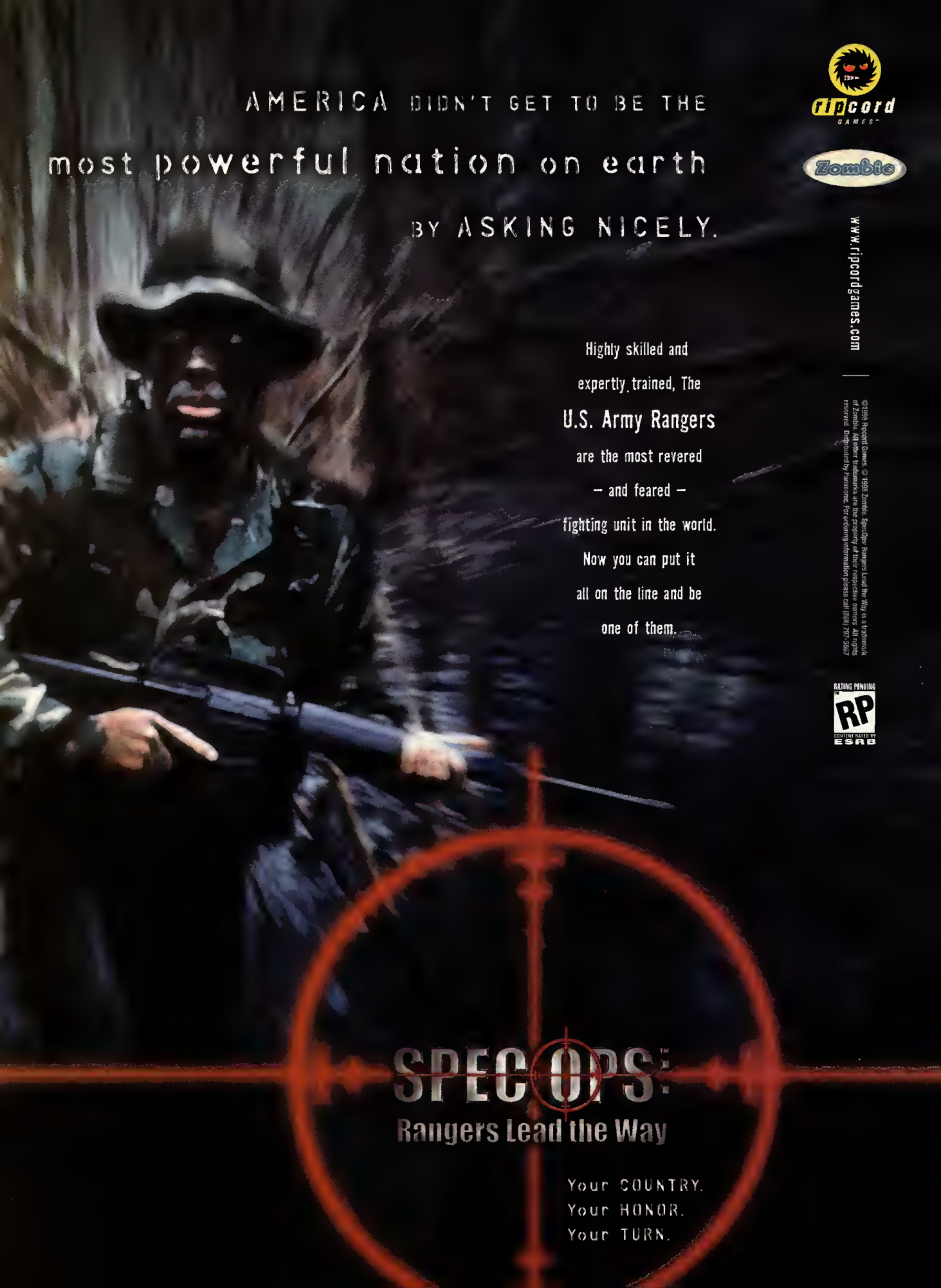


Like the U.S. Army Rangers, **SpecOps: Rangers Lead the Way** isn't for lightweights. It's intensely real, with motion-capture technology, photorealistic textures, stunning outdoor 3D environments and actual ambient and weapons sounds. Your missions range from blowing up SCUD bases in North Korea to rescuing hostages in Afghanistan. You might even receive a medal. But that's not why you signed up. You joined to uphold the honor of the Rangers and your country. **So let's go, soldier. Your country needs you.**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More of what you want — previews

Over the past few years, the editors of this section have seen a growing number of, well, growing numbers after the titles of the games previewed. Sequels may have a heavier grip on the game industry than they do on the film industry, but that hasn't stopped **Next Generation** from bringing readers the latest on different kinds of games and refreshing new worlds to explore. This month, peel out with *Trans-Am*, a game that puts some new air in the racing genre's tires, and get an update on the abstract *Silicon Valley*. Yet, as great games deservedly demand sequels, this month we look at: *Fighting Vipers 2*, *Descent III*, *Abe's Exxodus*, and the return of a great gaming icon, the Prince of Persia

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EAI puts the pedal to the metal in this sim

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Trans-Am Racing '68-'72

The historic racing series (from which Pontiac borrowed the name) muscles its way back into the limelight with classic cars and some impressive technology, courtesy of newcomers Engineering Animations Inc.

Format:	PC
Publisher:	GT Interactive
Developer:	Engineering Animations Inc.
Release Date:	August/September 1998
Origin:	U.S.

The '60s gave birth to many things — the integrated circuit, rock music festivals, and moon landings. But nothing captures the zeitgeist of the late '60s better than its muscle cars. The racing series that captured the raw essence of these street cars? No, it wasn't your father's NASCAR. It was the Sports Car Club of America's Trans-Am series.

Trans-Am pitted everything from Javelins to Porches to Barracudas to Mustangs against each other on winding tracks that ranged from 1.45 miles to just over four miles in length. Since the race cars were real production cars (unlike the fiberglass facsimiles raced today), in the sport's heyday, the slogan "win on Sunday, sell on Monday" sparked a fierce rivalry between auto manufacturers to put the fastest cars on the track. The cache of Trans-Am was so great that it inspired Pontiac to license the series name for its new sports car.

Trans-Am, the sport, was killed by the gas crisis of the early '70s and federal regulations that declawed muscle cars. Yet, though the golden era of Trans-Am racing died, the memory of it didn't, especially for amateur race car driver Asif Chaudhri. Chaudhri, then a producer at GT (he's since moved to Visual Concepts), was not content to let an era of such powerful cars lie forgotten, so he obtained the Trans-Am license from the Sports Car Club of America. A technology partner appeared when Iowa-based Engineering Animations Inc. came to GT with a strong racing engine and physics package.

Car bodies were dipped in acid to take off extra weight and lower the center of gravity

Not unlike Papyrus' forthcoming *Grand Prix Legends*, *Trans-Am* will be more than just a racing game. It actually will attempt to capture and simulate an ephemeral high point in the sport's history.

"Trans-Am started in '65 or '66," says EAI Producer Adrian Penn, who co-designed the game with Chaudhri. "But '68 to '72 are considered the golden years of the sport, largely because of caliber drivers who were available — you had drivers like Mark Donahue, Parnelli Jones, and Dan Gurney. Also starting around '67, the manufacturers started pouring money into the series. It became a grudge match that heightened around '70, with Ford, GM, and American Motors really going at it."

And go at it they did. Unlike the high-tech, safety-conscious, almost antiseptic quality of racing today, Penn emphasizes

Expect the screen to refresh at a rate of 30fps. Car models average 250 polygons but can be as low as 75 and as high as 400

ng alphas

Gritty and intense best describe Trans-Am racing; note the Javelin's realtime lift onto two wheels after a nasty nudge from the Mustang

the grittiness that characterized Trans-Am racing and insists that it's this atmosphere that the team hopes to capture with the game.

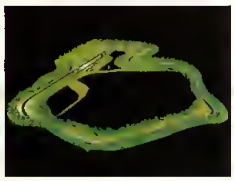
Races didn't happen on ordinary circular courses where all-powerful judges could look down upon bunched masses of cars, either. Instead, most races took place on longer, "closed road" style courses, which featured many minor elevation changes (which translated, at high speeds, into plenty of air time for drivers).

[*Trans-Am* features] realtime damage modeling, calculated on-the-fly and unique to each crash

These types of courses made bumping tougher to monitor, too, and thus, much more frequent. The sport itself begs to be compared to the kind of racing practiced by delinquent teens on back roads. "Safety wasn't a major concern," says Penn, who has become a walking history book of the sport since starting the project. "Trees grew pretty close to the edge of the track."

Another example of this were the car bodies that were dipped in acid to take off excess body weight and lower the center of gravity, though this created the downside that the cars would sometimes fall apart during races. Penn assures **Next Generation** that this kind of random mechanical failure will be simulated.

The need for speed did cause some fatalities, including driver Jerry Titus, who died of injuries suffered in a bridge collision, and several spectators, who were killed by flying tires and "that sort of thing," explains Penn.



Real tracks raced from '68 to '72 are being re-created for *Trans-Am*

To get that realism, EAI promises the most advanced physics engine ever in a racing game. Tough talk from a novice developer, but if anyone has the pedigree to pull it off on the first try, it may be EAI.

Located in Ames, Iowa, 30 minutes north of Des Moines, the company has been creating CG video animations used in consulting and courtroom work for years. Modeling everything from anatomical blood flow to the last minutes of TWA Flight 800, EAI has built quite a reputation in the simulation field.

The question is, can a group of artists and engineers who bring legally admissible visual re-creations to the courtroom bring true gameplay to the PC? Considering a large portion of the sim work the company does is in the re-creation of automobile accidents, EAI is in a position to bring many elements of realism to the game — elements that have yet to grace the interactive medium.

Specifically, an accurate physics model with six degrees of freedom, and in a landmark move, realtime damage modeling, calculated on-the-fly and unique to each crash.

While other racing game developers are just beginning to get their hands around this type of technology, EAI has been doing it for some time. Dr. Al Lynch (Ph.D. in physics), EAI's vehicle dynamics expert, joined the company from the General Motors Tech Center and is lending an unprecedented amount of expertise to the physical and collision modeling. Lynch describes the vehicle physics: "There are inertia effects. As you apply braking forces, it will nose down the vehicle. As you accelerate, it will squat the rear end down, so there are spring effects that make those things happen."

Lynch's physics are best displayed in the tumultuous crashes demonstrated when a car flips end-over-side after hitting a corner embankment at high speed. "We know when we have a collision like that," says an excited Penn, "what point on the car you've made contact. We know the impact vector, we know the energy and the forces involved."

Penn and Lynch explain how all this data is used to calculate "crush." There are stiffness properties at each vertex on the mesh of the car, with the front and rear stiffer than the sides. Every vertex has a crush parameter, so as you crush particular points, they move in, distorting the polygon to reflect the impact.

"It's done in real time," says Penn proudly, "it's not canned. It's unique every time. If you hit stationary objects, it's going to be different than if you hit something

The vehicle physics feature a full six degrees of freedom, so when a car crashes, expect it to roll, pitch, and bounce in a realistic manner. The physics demo above may appear tame, but it will soon apply to seven-car pileups

The skinny on EAI

EAI was casually formed at Iowa State in 1988 by engineering professor Dr. Martin Vanderploeg (pronounced "Vanderplow"). After performing some vehicle dynamics consulting work for car manufacturers, Vanderploeg and his three associates realized the importance of computer graphics in effectively re-creating accidents. The company then began offering consulting services as well as computer animation services.

By 1990, the company hired its CEO and made a full time go of it, quickly growing into the leader in the field and developing (and selling) proprietary animation software. That led to a desire to do interactive software (the company's first CD-ROM was *The Dynamic Human*, which taught anatomy) and finally, to games. In 1996, EAI acquired a group of game developers in Salt Lake City and now boasts a 50-person operation there. Vanderploeg mentions the company is working on "a lot of unannounced titles," but its best-known work to date is a Barbie hairdressing game for Mattel.

ng alphas

An "equalizer option" gives all cars identical properties, thereby ensuring no advantage for players driving a Dodge Dart or Camaro

that's moving. We know which vertices we are affecting, and we also know where each car's texture map is being affected, so we can build damage maps on top of the affected areas."

"Some of the damage is reversible," Penn adds. "Since we know how much damage is stored at each vertex, we can also back it out. So you can have your pit guys bang out panels."

Pit crews will be able to bang the dents out of 13 different classic car makes and models, but different team paint schemes and options will make the actual number of selectable vehicles much higher. The game will also feature 19 of the real drivers and 13 tracks of the period. This turned out to be something of a challenge, though, since several of the tracks are no longer in existence. As a result, the EAI designers took surveying trips to re-create the courses and used a high-end Global Positioning System to gather altitude data.

The game will include a single-race mode and a season mode, complete with drivers' and manufacturers' point championships, as well as an arcade mode and simulation mode. A single-player race puts drivers behind the wheel against 19 other nonplayer cars while as many as 16 players can compete in the multiplayer mode via LAN or the Internet.

A true 3D cockpit will be modeled for each car, enabling players to glance left and right. But surely the best feature of the cockpit view is apex tracking (seen in Microsoft's *CART Precision Racing*), which pans the camera into the turn the way drivers naturally turn their heads. This will be a welcome break from the problematic, fixed-camera cockpit views seen in other racing titles.

The AI in the game has been modeled to re-create the styles of the better-known drivers. "We want you to feel like you're racing against the driver, not just his car," says GT Product Marketing Manager Tony Kee. "Parnelli Jones was an aggressive driver, he bumped a lot, so when you're familiar with the game and you see his car coming up in the rearview mirror, you'll realize he may hassle you more than others."

But opposing vehicles won't be limited to rigid, preprogrammed behavioral patterns. The team is implementing a startlingly complex AI system to create an AI formula that works not unlike the human thought process. "We're training these neural nets right now," says Lead Programmer John Pursey, "to learn the best path around the tracks and dynamically recalculate how to get around obstacles very fluidly. So there won't be a jerky or static behavior to the AI cars."

Of course, all this innovation won't come cheap. The game will require 3D accelerator

Customizable options? Try chassis, gearbox, tires, brakes, and suspension

hardware, and while it hasn't been set yet, the minimum system will be either a P166 or P200. Penn also explains that the team has been working closely with Intel, so expect AGP support as well as support for the second generation 3D chipsets from 3Dfx and PowerVR. There will also be force-feedback compatibility with most high-end steering devices.

Still early in development, EAI plans to add graphic touches like specular highlighting and environment mapping, and Penn has some ideas on how to really add some flavor with the help of particle system effects. "If you lock your brakes up going into a corner," says Penn, "you'll see smoke coming off your pads. If you are having engine trouble, there are three different types of smoke that will issue from underneath your hood — you'll see basic white steam for overheating, bluish smoke when you're burning some oil, and black smoke if you're in deep trouble."

"We want you to feel like you're racing against the driver, not just his car"

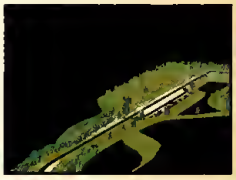
Tony Kee, marketing manager GT

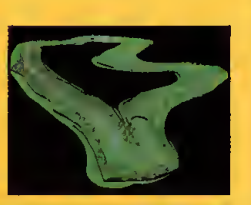
The audio will complement all these visual features with fully 3D spacialized sound and plenty of ambient effects. The soundtrack is expected to be on the traditional rock side, and an announcer will call the action.

While EAI certainly demonstrated to **Next Generation** that it has the technology to compete with veteran racing game developers, it remains to be seen whether or not the company can deliver artful gameplay in its first attempt to reach a hardcore audience. And one has to wonder if this rookie team truly understands the importance of refining the intangibles.

Unlike the anime-postered, action-figure-cluttered desks of many development offices, EAI is refreshingly devoid of juvenilia, and it's reaffirming to see developers taking their project as seriously as many paying consumers will. The meticulous nature of the people involved suggests that if they're not sure it's ready, they'll procure the resources to polish *Trans-Am* to a Turtle Wax finish. And if that's the case, this team of 15 Iowa boys are gonna give everyone one hell of a race.

No generic desh, each car will heve e custom, true 3D cockpit (top)





A proprietary tool called Vismodel wes used to creete the vehicles. Is it e good tool? Well, the compeny is providing DirectModel for Microsoft. The cars ebove can be seen in three stages: e wireframe model, the model with flat sheding, and the final car complete with texture maps

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{or why deception, cruelty and betrayal are your friends}

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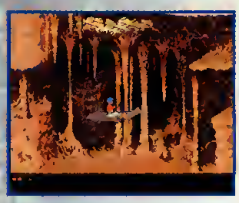
Prince of Persia 3D

Ten years after the original *Prince of Persia* wowed the world, can Red Orb pull him into 3D shape?



Hard to believe it's been five years since *Prince of Persia 2: The Shadow and the Flame* (shown above). A five-year sequel cycle?

Almost 10 years ago, the original *Prince of Persia* set new standards for animation and gameplay. Expanding on the techniques he had used while developing *Karateka*, designer Jordan Mechner combined rotoscoped animation with a truly cinematic vision and some of the most fiendishly clever traps and puzzles yet seen. An instant classic (even if it took a while to catch on), *Prince of Persia* was like nothing else that came before it, influencing a generation of games that followed — echoes can still be found in such modern classics as *Tomb Raider*.

It's been more than five years since the sequel, *Prince of Persia 2: The Shadow and the Flame*, but the world won't have to wait much longer for another installment. "About a year ago," says producer Andrew Pederson, "I was talking with my boss, Ken Goldstein [general manager of Red Orb], and saying that we're sitting on the crown jewel of our entertainment portfolio, and we really need to do something about it. It was a game that I was very passionate about when I first started with Broderbund back in '89-'90, and I jumped up and down on Ken's desk thinking that I could do it. I mean, the hardware is now at a point in which we can really do something that is worthy of the *Prince of Persia* legacy. And after yelling and screaming, I finally got the resources to get the ball rolling."

"The hardware is now at a point in which we can do something worthy of the *Prince* legacy"

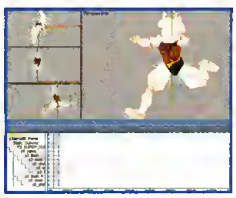
Andrew Pederson, producer

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Red Orb
Developer:	Red Orb
Release Date:	Q1 1999
Origin:	U.S.

And rolling it is *Prince of Persia 3D* seems set to inject the same kind of elegance into 3D gaming as the original did for 2D. Mechner is back, working with the Red Orb team as a design consultant, and he's co-authoring the story, which takes place shortly after the events of *The Shadow and the Flame*. This time, the prince and princess are happily married, but naturally things are never quite that simple. It turns out that the sultan's evil brother Assan is quite furious because the princess was betrothed to his deformed son Rugnor. Luring the prince and princess into a trap, Assan has the prince beaten and thrown in the dungeon while he absconds with the princess, heading for Rugnor's castle.

Visual Designer Chris Grun has extensively researched the period in Persia's history when the *Arabian Nights* were written. "The time period really lends itself to a broad range of backgrounds," Grun says, "because there was so much war and internal strife — Islam was sweeping through Persia, so there was a lot of turmoil, a lot of different kind of cultures going on in Persia at that time."

Grun also designed all of the game's characters, which will include more supernatural beasts than previous games in the series. "A lot of the creatures I found were directly from myths," he says, pulling volumes from a huge stack of



The Motion Factory's Motivate animation and AI system is being used to keyframe all of the game's movement

If a sense of high adventure is what we've come to expect from the series, it looks as if we won't be disappointed

source books. "Weird, crazy-looking creatures and demons. Their mythology had some pretty fantastic creatures, a really rich kind of background. One of the main influences that I look towards, K. Nielson, did one of the definitive versions of the *Arabian Nights*, and Edmond de Lack also is another one who had really great stuff." Grun smiles, "These are the greats — and nothing's better than looking towards the greats."

POP3D's core technologies are Numerical Design Ltd.'s NetImmerse rendering engine and Motion Factory's Motivate character animation and AI system (see Toolbox, **NG 37**). It's a strategy that many in the industry have been utilizing for the last year or so — using a prebuilt engine like *Quake*'s or *Unreal*'s, which enables designers to concentrate their efforts on design rather than technology. The job of integrating the two and modifying the development environment to suit the game's needs falls to "chief technologist" Peter Lipson, formerly with Atari coin-op and Mindscape, and Carey Clutts, who worked for Autodesk on 3D Studio R4.

"We came from a variety of different backgrounds," Lipson explains. "So using some of Carey's contacts, we started looking at different partners we might work with. That's where NDL's NetImmerse package came from — Turner Whitted, who founded NDL, he *invented* raytracing. He's been doing this for a long time, and [NDL's] got a very nice, very full-featured 3D package. Plus, Carey has known him for a while, and since it's a good relationship, we have the ability to do anything special we might need to do."

NetImmerse is extremely flexible and is capable of handling both interior and exterior scenes, fogging, environment mapping, and a number of other special effects. *POP3D* will require a 3D accelerator, and NetImmerse supports Direct3D, OpenGL, and 3Dfx Glide.

Motivate's animation system is uniquely suited to the team's needs as well. Since fluid, realistic animation is a hallmark of the series, preserving that in a 3D environment could have proven tricky. "We looked at motion capture extensively," Pederson says, "and basically decided not to use that because once you motion capture somebody and get the data, it's very difficult to manipulate the data. Instead, similar to

Producer Andrew Pederson (above) and the rest of the *POP3D* team (top) is among the most dedicated group Next Generation has met

Jordan Mechner's career

Fourteen years ago, Jordan Mechner's *Karateka* took the gaming community by storm, introducing players to an epic experience never before achieved in a videogame. For the first time on a home computer, game graphics went from being simple shapes to fluid human animation. Mechner's characters not only looked like people, they moved like them too. Players were drawn into the action as never before by its compelling visuals, which created a sense of drama that until then had only been found in cinema. But this would be the first glimpse of what would possibly become — with the advent of faster and larger machines — Mechner's greatest design: *Prince of Persia*.

While Red Orb works hard to bring *Prince of Persia* into the third dimension, it seems appropriate to look back at the work of Jordan Mechner, a collection whose size belies its influence.

Karateka

Platform(s) **Apple II, Atari 800, Commodore 64, Atari ST, NES, Game Boy, PC**
Release Date **1982**

Plot: Players take on the role of the hero, who returns to his village to find it burned to the ground by the evil warlord Akuma. On top of that, Akuma has kidnapped the hero's fiancee and taken her to his fortress high atop a craggy cliff. Players must fight their way into the heart of the fortress and defeat Akuma before it is too late.

Historical Notes: When Mechner found out Broderbund was looking for games to publish, he sent in an *Asteroids*-style game called *Deathbounce*. Instead of landing a deal, however, he received a letter from Doug Carlston, original talent scout in the early days of Broderbund, now chairman of the board. The letter came with a copy of *Choplifter!* and a joystick (a rare piece of hardware in those days) and said in part that while triangles and circles shooting at each other could make a good

game, Broderbund was more interested in the kind of graphics and gameplay that *Choplifter!* provided. If Mechner could design something with better graphics and a deeper plot, Broderbund might be interested. Mechner took it to heart and a year later showed the first level of *Karateka* to Broderbund, who was stunned to see such a complete and quality product. *Karateka* introduced large animated characters with a scrolling backdrop and cut scenes, and gamers were drawn into the game's world like no other before it. Small cinematic touches like rapid cuts between player and enemy as they approached and bowed to each other only increased its dramatic appeal. (After playing through *Choplifter!*, Mechner promptly returned the joystick.)

Prince of Persia

Platform(s) **Apple II, Amiga, PC, Atari ST, Sam Coupe, Amstrad CPC, Game Boy, Mac, NES, Super NES, Sega Game Gear, Sega Genesis, Turbo CD, PC-9801, X68000, FM Towns**

Release Date **1986**

Plot: The prince has won the heart of the sultan's lovely daughter but in so doing has made a powerful enemy — the Grand Vizier Jaffar. On his orders, the prince is arrested and thrown into the sultan's dungeons. As for the princess, Jaffar gives her one hour to decide: Marry him, or die. All hopes rest on players, in the role of the prince, to save the day.

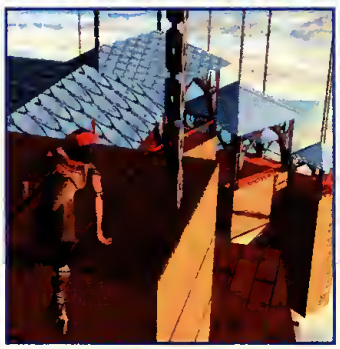
Historical Notes: *Prince of Persia* almost didn't happen. Shortly after the game went into production, Mechner's other love, film, took over. After a series of disappointing attempts to get his screenwriting career going, he decided to go back to the project he had started for Broderbund. He worked side by side with the likes of Corey Kosak (Print Shop) in a place called the "attic," a small development house set up by Broderbund. With a few lessons to be learned from Ed Hobb's game, *Castles of Doctor Creep* (a game Mechner enjoyed on the Commodore 64), along with coding tips from the Print Shop guru, *Prince of Persia*

the process that Jordan went through in rotoscoping the character, we're conducting a motion study. We hired a nationally ranked gymnast, who we're going to be videotaping from multiple angles, going through a variety of these moves."

That tape will then be digitized and used as a guide for Motivate's keyframing animation system. Motivate breaks actions down into extremely simple movements, then uses a highly advanced form of inverse kinematics to smoothly transition from one action to the next. It also enables movements to be combined, so a character who's running, for example, can also reach for an object.

This flexibility should certainly come in handy for the eventual player, since, also in keeping with the *Prince* legacy, *POP3D* will be chock full of highly lethal traps and tricks, the responsibility of co-designers Tom Rettig (who worked on the music for the PC port of the original *POP*) and Todd Kerpelman. Although somewhat hesitant to give much away (cryptic allusions to something called a "sphere buster" were quickly hushed down), their enthusiasm is obvious. "Many traps are things you want to keep," Rettig explains. "You've got to have the spikes, you've got to have the big slicing blades. These things are signature *Prince of Persia* and also fun traps. But we've been talking about a number of new ones. One puzzle that Jordan had originally designed but that was too hard at the time involved filling a room with water, which obviously is not a big deal now. We've got these rotating blades, kind of a variation on the

Players can also expect some action to go along with the adventure, although true to the series, combat isn't the focus



The game's production design (as exemplified by this combination hot air balloon and cruise ship — "floating platforms" indeed) is breathtaking and highly imaginative

slicer blades, but each has a visual distinction and also a different manner in which you have to navigate through them — you couldn't do that before."

In terms of combat, *POP3D* will include sword fighting but will also feature a few other weapons, including a bow and several other kinds of swords. Pederson stresses, "We really refer to it as an 'adventure/action' game. We're seeing the ratio as being around 80/20 — 20% action and 80% moving through an environment packed with all of the traps and surprises that *Prince of Persia* is known for."

The watchword, however, is simplicity. Literally all the team members at Red Orb that **Next Generation** talked to fell all over themselves, insisting that the game's control scheme would stay faithful to the original's elegance. Kerpelman puts it this way: "We want to keep it simple. We don't want to turn this into memorizing all the secret combos, memorizing all these hit strings — that may be fine for some games, but I don't think it's appropriate for a *Prince of Persia* game."

The team's dedication is obvious, and its love for the original *Prince of Persia* is equally so. Doug Carlston, founder of Broderbund and chairman of the board, says the decision to green light the project was an easy one. "I really felt like this was organic," Carlston explains, "like it just sort of came up and that it was a game that folks wanted to work on, at least a game folks here wanted to work on. Jordan was finishing up *Last Express* and could be available to help us, and, well, it was Andrew's passion, it was Tom's passion. It was born because people wanted to do it."

Jordan Mechner describes the work of visual designer Chris Grun as, "Not Disney, not realistic, just *Prince of Persia*." We agree

was well under way. When released, the Apple II was in full decline and game sales were dismal. The PC version met with a better reception but still lacked the kind of success that eventually came from being repackaged and licensed out to other platforms.

Ironically, the original box art had the princess displaying some cleavage, something the industry felt gamers weren't ready for at the time. It was modified to be a bit more conservative, and those gamers who own the original square box will notice the princess' unnaturally painted-over top. Also, Mechner was quite displeased with the Sega Genesis box art, which depicted a Luke Skywalker-looking prince viciously attacking a black guard. Offended, Mechner rejected the box art, but it was already being printed. He did manage to get his name removed from the cover, which eventually got placed back on when it made its U.S. debut. Despite the whole ordeal, the Sega Genesis version became the best-selling port of the game. Mechner developed the entire game himself on the Apple II and consulted on all the other versions to varying degrees. Dan Gorlin, the man responsible for *Choplifter!*, the benchmark for Broderbund's early recruiting, developed the Amiga version.

Prince of Persia 2: The Shadow and the Flame

Platform(s) **PC, Mac**
Release Date **1993**

Plot: The evil Jaffar is back, this time assuming the prince's identity, stealing his beloved princess, and casting him out of the palace as a beggar. As the prince flees across rooftops with palace guards in relentless pursuit, he knows not who his real enemy is, nor how to defeat him.

Historical Notes: For the first time, Mechner would not have a hand in the programming of the game. Working with a staff of 15, he served as creative consultant and game designer. The game introduced new elements like magic and snakes, with better graphics and more diverse locations. Without

many ports to other platforms, the game's exposure was limited to personal computers, and those gamers who preferred consoles would inevitably not see much more of Mechner's work.

The Last Express
Platform **PC, Mac**
Release Date **1997**

Plot: Players take the role of Robert Cath, a young American who is urgently summoned by his dear friend Tyler Whitney to join him on the train departing the Gare d'Lest on July 25, 1914. Cath arrives late, only to find that Tyler has been savagely murdered. Cath assumes Tyler's identity to unmask the killer and is quickly plunged into a world of high adventure, romance, and political intrigue. Compelled not only to find out who killed his friend and why, but also why his friend was aboard this train, Cath must figure out how to complete Tyler's mission.

Historical Notes: In 1993, Mechner formed his own company, Smoking Car Productions. *The Last Express* would be a giant creative leap for Mechner, combining his love of film and game design into one masterpiece. He also directed the tool development, bringing his experience of rotoscoping to the next wave of developers. Smoking Car raised $5 million for development and hired 40 people. Mechner got his chance to direct a cast of 60 actors in voice recording and live action blue screen shots. He also took on the responsibility of editing, sound design, and music composition in post-production. The final release had less than expected sales but received critical acclaim (see Finals, NG 31) and can be argued as being a product ahead of its time. With the new era of DVD on the horizon, *The Last Express* could enjoy the same resurrection as *Prince of Persia*. Don't expect to see much more from Smoking Car Productions, though — it was a one-product company, and most of the staff is already dispersed within the industry. The stress of such a venture is something Mechner is not anxious to repeat anytime soon.

An interview with Jordan Mechner

In the 14 years since the publication of his first game *Karateka*, Jordan Mechner's modest body of work (*Karateka*, *Prince of Persia*, and *The Last Express*) belies its impact. By 1993, there was a version of *Prince of Persia* for literally almost every game system on the planet (including Game Boy), and action/adventure games were never the same again. **Next Generation** takes a moment out to talk to the man who brought rotoscoping to your computer screen.

NG: Could you take us back a little bit? There's a lot of history here. Where did *Prince* come from originally?

The first step was to film my brother and have him run back and forth in the *Reader's Digest* parking lot

JM: For that, I've got to take you back to 1986, when I just graduated from college. *Karateka* had come out and it was selling. All I wanted to do in high school was make computer games, and right out of college I was in this incredibly lucky position where I actually had a game that was selling. So I didn't need to do what everybody else was doing, which was find a job that would pay the rent. I said, well this year, basically I could just make games! So I made a deal with Broderbund, which was a very simple deal and hearkens back to a more innocent time when there were no development budgets because all you really needed to make a game was a computer. The deal was that Broderbund could give me an office, and if and when I ever managed to produce a game, they could publish it.

Prince of Persia — I guess the idea I started out with was very simply to try to take it past *Lode Runner*, *Lode Runner* being my favorite game at that time. There was another game that came out, *Castles of Doctor Creep*. It didn't get much circulation, I think partly because it was made for the Commodore 64. It was a platform game like *Lode Runner* but with these very clever Rube Goldberg-like traps. And what I wanted to do with *Prince of Persia* was a game which would have that kind of logical, head-scratching, fast-action, *Lode-Runner*-esque puzzles in a level-based game but also have a story and a character that was trying to accomplish a recognizable human goal, like save a princess. I was trying to merge those two things.

NG: So tell us about the animation.

JM: The first step, production-wise for me, was to film my brother David — he was about 16 years old at the time — put him in a pair of baggy pants, and have him run back and forth in the *Reader's Digest* parking lot, near where we lived in New York. I made him do all of the moves that I thought would be needed in the game: running, jumping, climbing up on the generator that was sitting out in the middle of the parking lot. That video formed the basis for the animation. It was basically an extension of a technique that I used in *Karateka* — in that case I used Super 8 because I didn't have a video camera yet. So, having filmed the action, the trick was to get the frames into the computer in some form and again, using the very latest technology, there was a board that came from a company in England, which let you basically point a little black-and-white video camera at an art stand, and it would digitize it and put it back on the computer. This was a huge advantage over the technique that I used in *Karateka*, which involved tracing the individual frames with a pantagraph, with two pentiometers, you know, one for X and one for Y, which jiggled a lot and never came out right.

So, in order to get those frames and animation cels, you basically drew all the curtains in the room and then popped the videotape in the VCR, hit play, hit pause, did a frame advance. You needed to isolate each frame and then snap the photograph with a Nikon camera, then you took them to a Fotomat. Then we traced the outline of each photograph in black and white, which was laid out with a black Magic Marker and White-Out, xeroxed it on a Xerox machine to get a really clean silhouette, put that on the art stand, digitized that, and that would give 16 frames, maybe 15 sheets of paper like that — each one with about 20 frames, and that was the animation for *Prince of Persia*. It really worked great.

You know, I'm not a trained animator, and whenever I tried to draw a stick figure and animate it from scratch, it always looked like stick figure animation from scratch [laughs]. But through this little miracle of tracing the frames, it just came to life. All that I had to do was slightly enhance the movement because my brother was only able to jump about

a foot and a half, so I expanded that by about a factor of 10, and he was able to clear those floor space gaps.

NG: So what was the most challenging part?
JM: Finishing. Finishing is always hardest. It's almost like ... you know the old one about asking a sculptor how he made an elephant, and he said you just take a big block and chip away everything that doesn't look like an elephant? Well, it's kind of the same way with a computer game. You've got all of these elements, and you know there's some stuff in there that doesn't really belong there. And you also know there are some things not in there that would make it great, if only you could think of what it was. So every day I would be leaving the office late at night thinking: "This isn't right. There's something that's going to make this game whole — if I could just think what that was."

At one point that was sword fighting. For the first year or so, I was absolutely adamant there was not going to be sword fighting. This was just going to be a guy interacting with a violent environment, but he wasn't going to dish it out. And everybody else in the attic was telling me that I was crazy, that I should give him a sword and let him fight some guards. Finally I gave in, and once I'd gotten it done — I didn't want to do it because it was so much work to get a different character in there, with his own animations — but once I'd gotten the guards programmed, I kind of grudgingly admitted that maybe they had something, that they were right [laughs].

NG: Your games have such a cinematic quality, though. How do you see film and videogames relating?
JM: I've done a lot of thinking about this. Just as theater is its own thing — with its own conventions, things that it does well, things it does badly — so is film, and so is computer games. And there is a way to borrow from one medium to another, and in fact that's what an all new medium does when it's first starting out. Film, when it was new, looked like someone set up a camera front and center and filmed a staged play. Then the things that are specific to film — like the moving camera, close-ups, reaction shots, dissolve — all these kind of things became part of the language of cinema. It's the same with computer games. To take a long film sequence and to play that on your TV screen is the bad way to make the game cinematic. The computer game is not a VCR. But if you can borrow from the knowledge that we all carry on inside our heads of how cuts work, how reaction shots work, what a low angle means, dramatically, what it means when the camera suddenly pulls back. We've got this whole collective unconsciousness of the vocabulary of film, and that's a tremendously valuable tool to bring into computer gaming. And actually, 3D is a tremendously phenomenal opportunity because now you can put the camera down anywhere. In *Prince of Persia*, it was 2D and you had to put the camera far away, look at everything in profile, and that's where the camera was for six hours. Now you can actually cut whenever you want because the whole world exists in 3D models. I think we're just beginning to tap into what can be done for that.

For the first year or so, I was adamant there was not going to be sword fighting

NG: Do you think a lot of people have problems getting there? Are designers able to use 3D space?
JM: Yeah. Despite tremendous technological advances, 3D games are still in their infancy in the sense of where to put the camera, just as movies were in their early days. Every new game that comes out brings some new variation on it. There was usually some important advance there that somebody can look at and say, "Yeah, that's the way to do it." And that gets drawn on in future games. But the problem that I have with all the games out there, and I've played some of them quite extensively for fun — actually, I've played *Tomb Raider* a lot with my wife because she's got a pretty good sense of direction, so she can tell me when I'm coming back to a door I've already been through. She'll say, "Why are you going there? You've been there before." [laughs].

My problem with all 3D games is that they're just too hard. I lose track of where I am, and there are so many controls at my fingers that I forget and never use them. I remember with *Prince of Persia*, what I really tried to do, and I hope we can translate that into 3D, is make the controls very simple. Whereas in a lot of games that I see, they're good once you get into them, but there's just this wall that you have to climb at the beginning of mastering D-pad controls and knowing how to go to an inventory screen and select your item. And jeez, if I have a hard time with that — I know there are other people out there who would play 3D games if they just weren't so hard.

NG: What did you think of *Tomb Raider* overall?
JM: Well, I didn't finish it [laughs]. But I played it with great enjoyment.

NG: The designers at Core deliberately designed that as kind of a 3D version of *Prince of Persia*.
JM: Yeah, I noticed the spikes [smiles].

NG: But given the huge success of *Tomb Raider*, they're basing their success off your success — you're the alpha of this cycle ...
JM: No, no! I'm not the alpha — *Castles of Doctor Creep* was the alpha [laughs]! I don't know, I haven't talked to Ed Hobbs. I don't know what games he thought he was stealing from. But in fact we always think we're stealing, but what it comes down to is we borrow from everywhere: movies we've seen, books we read, games we've played, and real life as well. If you can merge all those elements into something that's coherent and captures people's imaginations, then you know you've done your job. And then you pass it on to the next fellow.

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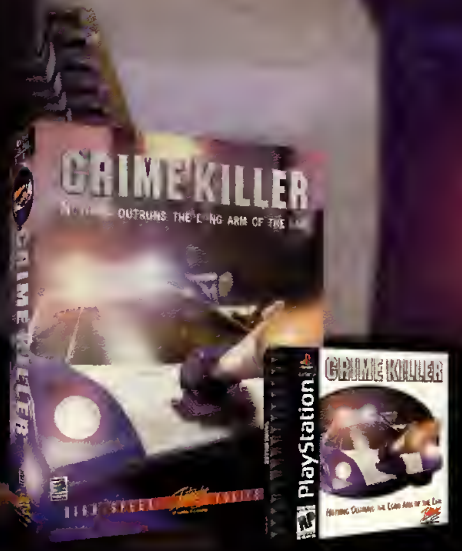

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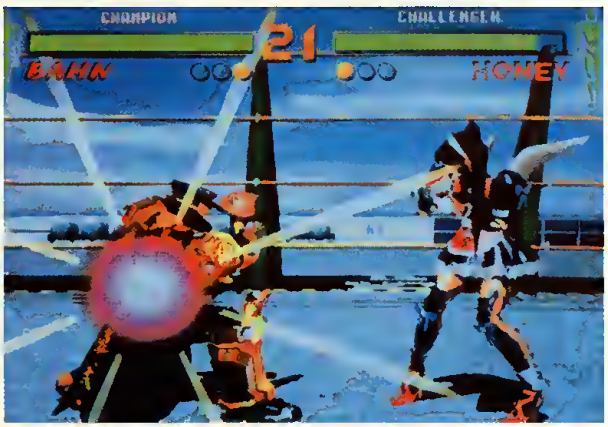
Fighting Vipers 2

With Model 3 in and Saturn out, *Fighting Vipers* is back to give the arcade another go



These laser light explosions are a direct benefit of using the Model 3 technology

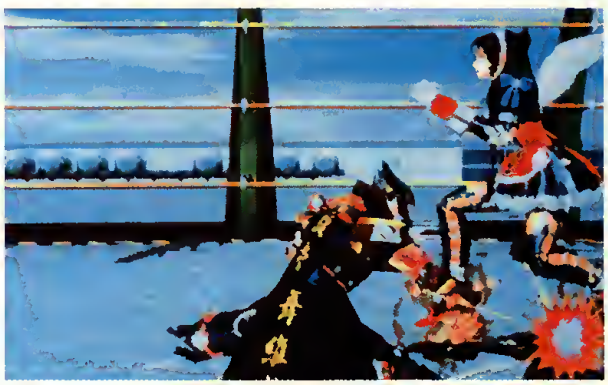
Format:	Arcade
Publisher:	Sega
Developer:	Sega AM2
Release Date:	Spring 1998
Origin:	Japan

Since the release of *Street Fighter II* in 1991, fighting games have saturated the market. In fact, it seems that throughout most of the '90s, it would have been virtually impossible to fling a quarter through an arcade and not hit a fighting game. Yet, only several have been good enough to levitate above the glut of mediocre titles — *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter*, of course. And then there's *Fighting Vipers*, a game that can thank *Virtua Fighter* for paving much of its way to success. *Vipers* did, however, have some of its own, distinct features, namely an innovating game system, which featured caged arenas that were unprecedented at the time, cinema-style viewing, and breakaway armor in the form of some vogue piece of apparel like Picky's skater garb.

The major difference is the addition of two new characters

This time, players can clear one stage with one well-timed attack

Now, Sega's AM2 division is gearing up to continue the story of *Fighting Vipers*, this time running on a Model 3 board, which enables developers to push more than three times the polygons per second as Model 2. Besides the smoother, higher-resolution graphics, the major difference in this game is the addition of two new playable characters to the existing cast: Charlie, a BMX biker, and Emi, a small girl armed with a multitude of accoutrements — a giant teddy bear, for instance. The game will also feature a redesigned Mahler, the pro wrestler boss character. The Japanese fan base in particular should become quite fond of these new characters, as



Fans of the first *Fighting Vipers* will appreciate the return of all eight playable characters, including Honey and Bahn

The new character of Charlie will use his BMX bike to try to deal that knockout blow to his opponent

New girl Emi (top) and a redesigned Mahler will grace the sequel

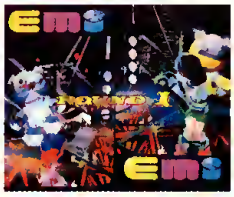
each was designed by Imai Toons, a popular character-design company in Japan.

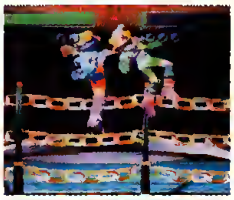
Naturally, each of the characters will also come back showing off some new tricks. So expect Raxel, the long-haired, Bon Jovi-esque rocker/fighter from the first game to possess even more guitar-slinging antics in his arsenal. Likewise, newbie Charlie will use his bike in several fighting combinations.

Fighting Vipers 2 will also present several new tactics that should satisfy even the most discerning fighting gamers. One of these is the "Super K.O.," a specifically timed, multicombo attack that will enable players to defeat an opponent in one round as opposed to best of two out of three. But moderation is the key in using this move, as players who fail will become more vulnerable to their opponents. *Fighting Vipers 2* will also have a new multistage feature, which adjusts the sequence of stages and opponents according to players' skill levels, thus appeasing novices and experts alike.

But fighting game Luddites needn't worry — many of the features from the first game have remained intact, including the armor system, flying attacks, dashes, and the ability to hurl an opponent through a wall. So then can players expect to experience a little deja vu when playing *Fighting Vipers 2*? Probably. But that's to be expected, for it would be against AM2 tradition to screw too much with a sure thing. ng

Flailing bikes are just as dangerous as kicks and punches in *Fighting Vipers 2*





Watch out — Emi's giant teddy bear (top) is deadlier than it looks

Abe's Exxodus

Can Oddworld Inhabitants retain its characters' magic and exorcise the frustrations of Abe's first game?

Bringing a 2D game to market last year may have been ludicrous, but that is exactly what Oddworld Inhabitants delivered. "You'd have to be insane," says Oddworld President Lorne Lanning, "to do that when everyone thinks that only 3D games and sequels will sell. But we see things differently."

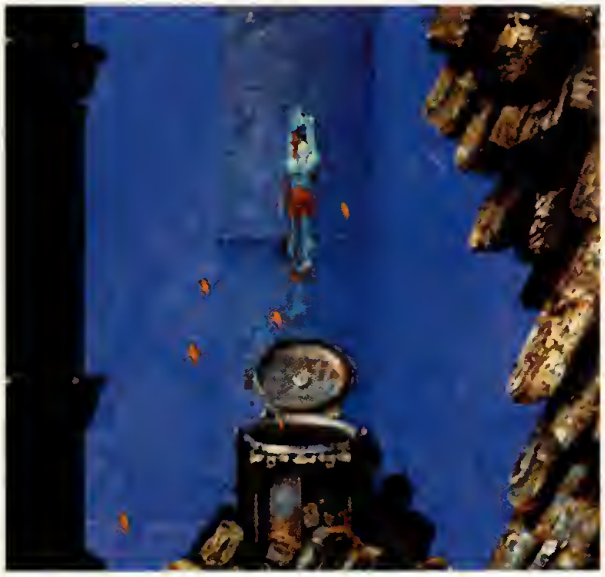
Lanning and company show no signs of pending sanity as they prepare to release the follow-up to *Abe's Oddysee* using the same 2D engine (with a few enhancements). "The current 32-bit systems just don't have the power to do [both] 3D and the other things that are important to us," says Lanning. "We are giving gameplayers something that is unique in its experience. We're pushing in a different direction. Some people think it is important to make 3D games; we think it is important to make more entertaining games."

Almost any creature in the game can be possessed and used to solve puzzles or explore areas of the game that are otherwise unreachable

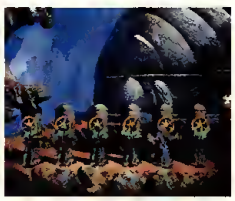
Format:	PlayStation/PC
Publisher:	GT Interactive
Developer:	Oddworld Inhabitants
Release Date:	November 1998
Origin:	U.S.

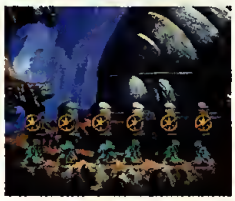
Pushing the genre won't be easy, and sequels are usually criticized for not demonstrating an advance in technology over their predecessor. That could be why *Exxodus* is not part of the planned quintology of *Oddysee* games. In fact, players won't see the second chapter until *Munch's Oddysee* is released on next generation consoles in 1999.

But for now, players will continue Abe's story where it left off. In *Exxodus*, our hero Abe learns that when he shut down Rupture Farms, he unknowingly created an ingredients shortage inside another Glukkon fast food corporation called Soul Storm Brewery. As a result of the shortage of bones, the Glukkons have begun mining the ancient Mudokon burial grounds. Once again, saving the Mudokons becomes Abe's main objective. This time, however, says Lanning, the game will be significantly bigger, the overall gameplay will be more balanced, and Abe will boast some new powers that give players greater control of the environment.



Jumping into a tube can send Abe to diffarent locations in the game, which can often lead to the discovery of new areas





All work and no play maka Abe a dull Mudokon

Listening to criticisms ragarding the first game, the developers have given Abe the ability to rally more than one Mudokon

Lanning is quick to point out that with *Exxodus*, the team is putting its efforts behind the first game's strengths. The game will include new characters, gameplay, levels, and movies, as well as enhanced visuals and more humor.

"One of the things to watch for," says Lanning, "is that we have given the Mudokons emotions. They are absolutely hysterical. This game is going to have everyone laughing but still maintain a high integrity of storytelling. We really wanted to push the humor and do more cool stuff like possess *all* the characters in the game and use their individual gamespeak commands for other purposes. What we are doing is pushing the personality of the videogame character to new heights. And that's what *Oddworld* is all about."

Adding the right features was the simple result of listening to gamers, Lanning says. "When *Abe's Oddysee* was released, we watched all the chat groups and forums on the Net very closely. We saw that some people were having difficulty, enough to make us take notice."

Enough notice that Lanning couldn't sleep some nights, determined to correct the problems with *Exxodus*. He explains that the biggest issues were the save feature and the fact that players often needed to die in order to learn solutions to puzzles. And while the developers offered players an infinite number of lives, they quickly learned that gamers were not all that happy having to die over and over again. "When hundreds of thousands of people start playing your game, its weaknesses get revealed to you very quickly," says Lanning.

In the end, though, the team realized that the 2D platform genre wasn't dead, it just wasn't being done right. But now, with a focus on storyline, new methods of interaction, and some ingenious puzzles, *Abe's Exxodus* ought to extend the life of the genre. As for Oddworld Inhabitants, it intends to offer an *Exxodus* game after every *Oddysee* release and has even hinted about an online Oddworld community. Is the company crazy enough to pull all this off? Lanning says it best: "Just wait till you see what Abe can do with his farts now."

Some scraans require quick reflaxas to survive, but Oddworld inhabitants insists it will not be as frustrating as the first game

A friendly pat on tha shoulder may be enough to set things right

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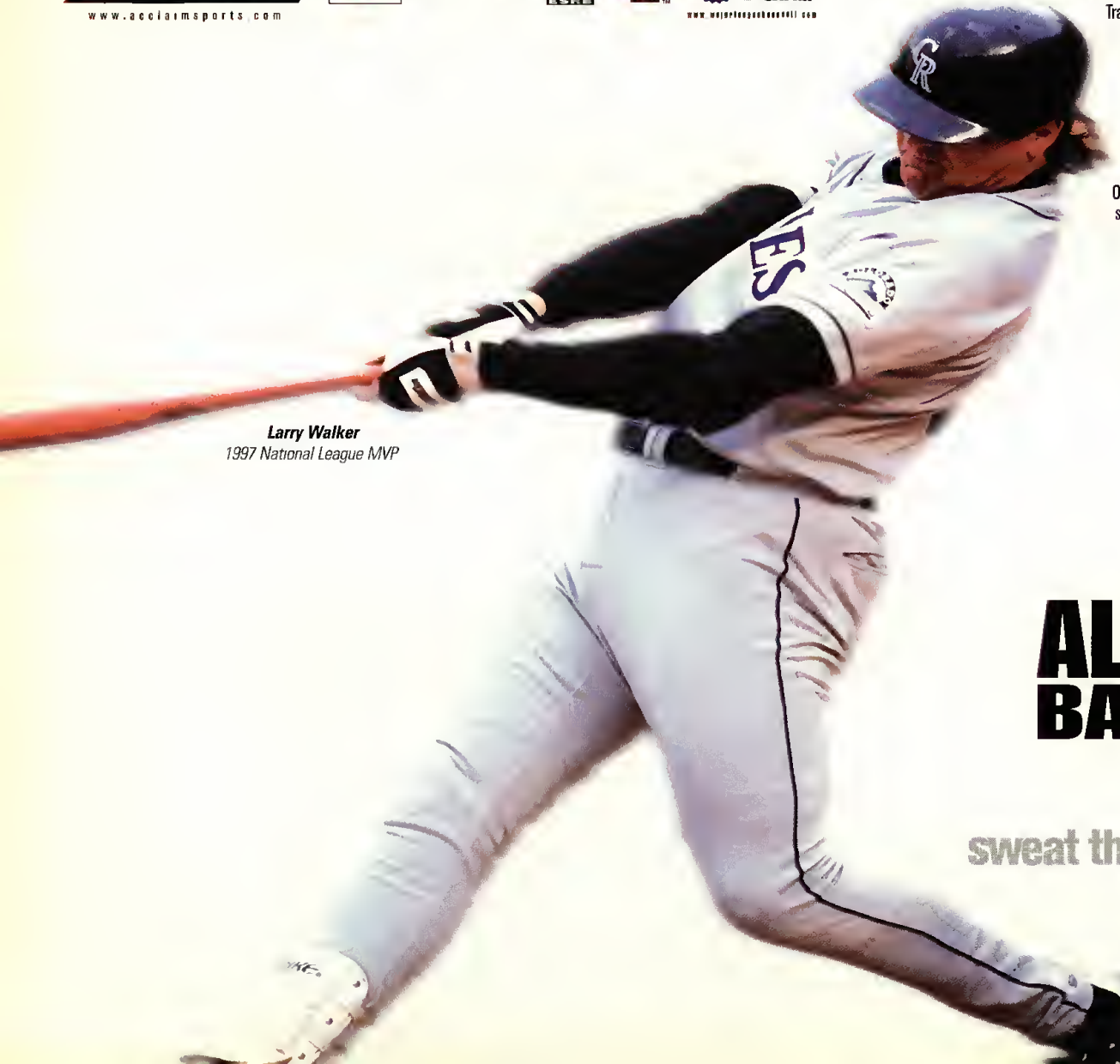

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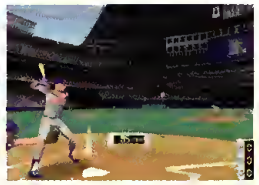

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ODT

With character design that could have come from the mind of Jules Verne, *ODT* may feature style that surpasses its gameplay

Already embodying the highly stylized design known to permeate most French games, *ODT* (*Or Die Trying*) is a third-person, action/adventure from the little known French arm of Psygnosis.

The game may be reminiscent of Bitmap Brothers' *Soldiers of Fortune* for the Super NES, but the story isn't. The airship of a small team in search of a pearl that can end a deadly epidemic crashes into the top of a mysterious tower. After selecting one of four characters, players must make their way down the tower, overcoming strange beasts and other obstacles in their quest. At times, the pacing resembles the run-and-gun action of *One*, yet there are also strategic elements akin to *Tomb Raider*.

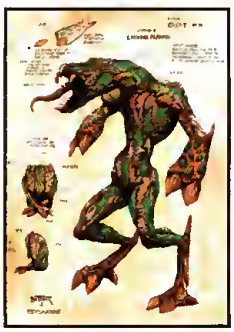
Format:	PlayStation/PC
Publisher:	Psygnosis
Developer:	Psygnosis France
Release Date:	Q4 1998
Origin:	France

Not only are the enemies visually impressive, but also they have an imbedded intelligence that makes them react proactively to players

Psygnosis insists that the final product will be more immersive than a typical action/adventure. For instance, an interesting AI structure enables enemies to intelligently react to players' gaming styles, so enemies will become more evasive with trigger-happy players or may even ambush those whose gunplay falls on the conservative side. With motion-blended animation, the game will avoid the jerkiness associated with many motion capture games. Also, the character's segmented gun arm independently and smoothly auto-targets enemies.

But great graphics and a good story can sometimes mask poor gameplay — Psygnosis' own *Shadow of the Beast* and *Shadow Master* are perfect examples. Hopefully, Psygnosis France has learned from its neighbors (French developers are notorious for eschewing gameplay in favor of graphics) and will round out *ODT*'s character design effort with some superior gameplay. As the genre grows by leaps and bounds, *ODT* will have to deliver a quality experience or else succumb to the same (well-deserved) consumer neglect that destroyed *Spawn: The Eternal*.

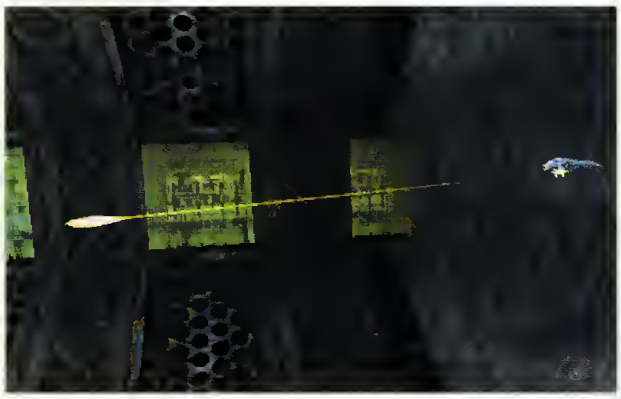
An environment that puts the player's life in constant jeopardy sets *ODT* apart from the exploratory qualities of *Tomb Raider*



***ODT* can only benefit from its highly detailed and original monster designs**

Descent III

Descent was cool, but *Descent II* was, well, pretty much more of the same. How can the series' creators rekindle the spark?



The original's vertigo-inducing, 360° freedom of movement has been retained for this ground-up sequel

The original *Descent* turned the first-person shooter on its ear — literally. Players who were used to the relatively plane-based game mechanics of *Doom* were introduced to a whole new concept that laughed at traditional ideas — like the ability to tell up from down. *Descent II* followed quickly, offering little more than new missions, although it did introduce the pesky Thief Bot and the helpful sidekick, Guide Bot.

"*Descent II* was based on the *Descent I* engine," says Producer Matt Toschlog. "It was its own game, but it was done relatively quickly and didn't involve a lot of engine rewrite. So we really looked at *Descent III* as an opportunity to go through and change everything that we would have liked to have changed in the first one. It's a from-the-ground-up rewrite of the *Descent* engine and the whole *Descent* gameplay system. We're really revisiting every aspect of gameplay and doing a lot of stuff we would have liked to have done the first time but were prevented because of time and money or the technology that was available."

The first and most obvious addition to *Descent III* is the inclusion of outdoor areas, freeing the series from its tunnel-bound concept. There will, of course, be indoor areas as well, but the Outrage team is shooting for a more organic feel. In fact, many missions begin by skimming the surface of a planet while searching for the entrance to a given underground complex, perhaps returning to the surface to complete a mission goal, and then going back into the tunnels

No, this really is a *Descent* sequel — the tunnel-bound mechanics of the first two games now includes outdoor as well as indoor areas

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Interplay
Developer:	Outrage
Release Date:	Q3 1998
Origin:	U.S.

somewhere else.

The transitions from exterior to interior appear quite smooth, which belies the fact that a different engine has to be used for each. "There's separate technological issues dealing with indoor and outdoor," Toschlog explains. "The outdoor engine is a height array-based terrain engine — you have a list of cells, and each one has a height, and that gets rendered as a couple of triangles in a grid. Indoors is more the *Descent*-style free-form engine with connected rooms. And then the indoor and the outdoor combine in certain places. So you'll have a building on the terrain with a door on the building, and you can fly in and then you're inside the mine."

The Thief Bot from *Descent II* has inspired the team to make sure all Bots have strange personalities and AI — the mind reels

Descent III will also bring more of a focus to the game's backstory

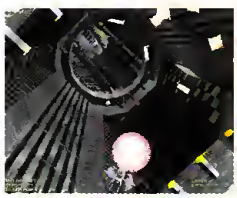
Descent III will also bring more of a focus to the game's backstory, with a greater mission-based structure than the previous installments. "If you think about it, *Descent I* and *II* were very repetitive," Toschlog says. "You had 25 or 30 levels that were all kind of the same: yellow key, red key, blue key, blow the reactor, you're done. It was hard to get really involved in a place. They looked different, but they didn't have a different feel from a gameplay perspective. So we're doing fewer levels now, but they're much bigger, and each one is a real location — it has a specific plot element, it has a real sense of place, and you're doing something specific to that place."

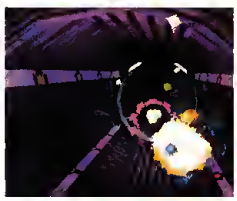
The game's planned 15 levels include vastly different environments with varying strengths of gravity. Naturally, there will be the expected lava worlds, but there will also be levels with giant ventilation ducts that buffet the player's craft. Another world is prone to surface tornadoes that deflect weapons fire. A selection of three ships will be available to the player, and ten new weapons, including a napalm cannon, are in the works.

"We're going for a lot more of the sort of character-based AI you saw in *Descent II* with the Thief Bot and the Guide Bot," Toschlog says, underscoring another change. "He was an enemy that you cared about. You would go out of your way, even do things that were bad for you, to hunt down the Thief Bot. It was a great experience because you got emotionally involved. So we're doing a lot more of that kind of stuff now — a lot more of the robots will have personality."

At the end of the day, though, all this talk about stronger story and Bots with personality doesn't take the focus off what made the series great. As Toschlog explains, "We often talk about that. In fact, we have to be careful that we don't get too involved with making everything seem logical — each level has a certain number of things you have to do to complete the level, but then we also remember that, well, here's a room full of nasty robots. The point of this room is. Blow up nasty robots!" He laughs. "That's got to be a part of things too, just blowing stuff up."

A tighter story-bound structure, with more organic and logical levels to explore, hes been promised, and every level will have its own internal functionality and overall production design





New special effects and weepons should keep things interesting

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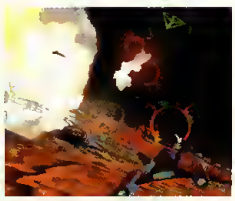
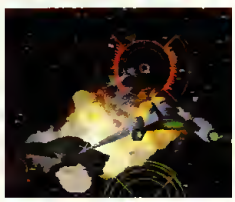
Incoming

Too often, spectacular visuals cloak inferior gameplay. Rage hopes adding action and strategy will change all that

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Rage
Developer:	Rage
Release Date:	Summer 1998
Origin:	U.K.

Incoming is quite the blend — combat and strategy elements are combined with intense action





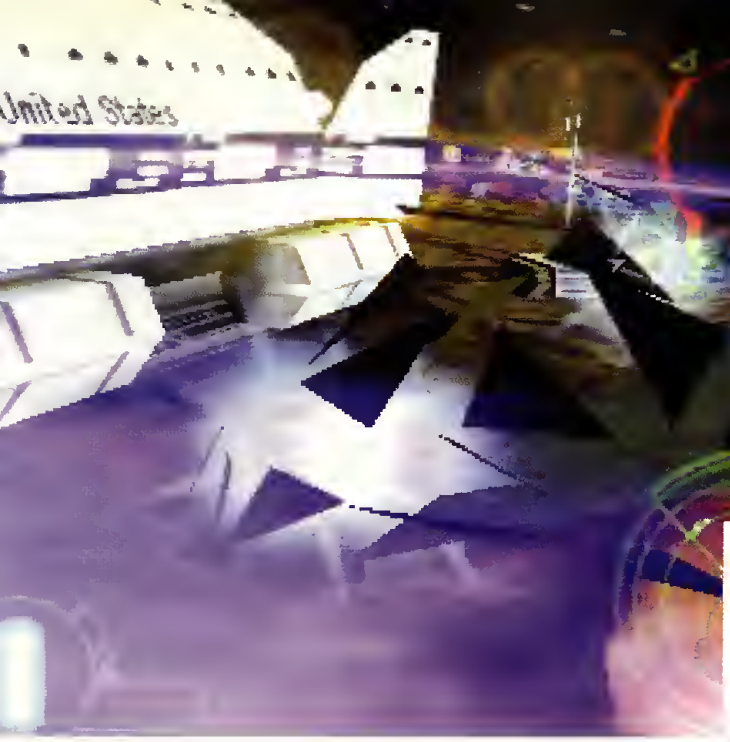
Each terrain creates its own set of challenges and foes to overcome

Owning a 3D accelerator is rapidly becoming mandatory, not just to get the best play experience, but to play at all. Games that require 3D acceleration can do things other titles only dream of doing. And among the forerunners of this emerging breed of games? Rage's *Incoming*, one of the most visually accomplished PC games **Next Generation** has ever seen.

Incoming's basic premise casts the player as a pilot defending various installations from alien attack, although its execution offers far more depth than this description suggests. Featuring a varied collection of operable attack craft, from helicopters to tanks, *Incoming* boasts a realtime blend of combat and strategic elements, although its emphasis is on intense action.

With 65 levels currently spread across six different environments (although the count continues to rise), Rage's creation should certainly score well in the longevity stakes. Many of the settings are highly inventive in their conception, particularly the Cape Canaveral defense scenario, a 60%-complete version seen by **Next Generation** was impressive, with craft flitting agilely about a set of lovingly detailed, launch-ready space shuttles — although the drawing-in of distant scenery is sudden. Rage is confident, though, that such issues will be rectified by the time *Incoming* is launched.

Spot graphic effects, particularly explosions and smoke trails, are among the best seen on any format. The shockwave rings that echo out from



The lighting and models promised by *Incoming* easily justify the 3D card requirement

around annihilated targets, similar to those pioneered in *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter*, are especially noteworthy. Lighting effects are also deployed to remarkable effect — a running demo of the moon stage features an orbiting spacecraft in near darkness, light just catching and glinting off the edges as it spins.

As yet, only one type of explosion has been implemented. It's beautiful to watch, however

While the expected PC network play options have been ticked off on *Incoming*'s generous options list, a split-screen, two-player mode has also been included. Although standard for many console games, simultaneous two-player action is sadly lacking from many PC titles — *Incoming* should provide PC owners with a welcome dose of such face-to-face rivalry. The split screen also hints at a console future for the game — the PowerVR-based Katana, perhaps?

Gamers will also be able to choose between tackling a full version of *Incoming*, suitably replete with strategy elements, or the pared-down arcade iteration. The tactical aspects are accessed through a separate "overview" screen, enabling players to issue commands to the various forces at their disposal; craft already confirmed for *Incoming*'s swelling arsenal include Cobra and Commanche helicopters, plus torpedo boats, tanks, and fighter planes.

Rage's development team is working at full tilt to imbue *Incoming* with as many features as possible prior to the game's release date. By then gamers should expect a title that gives Cyclone Studio's excellent *Uprising* more than a run for its money. ng

Players get to see the shuttle blast off if they successfully defend it

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World Grand Prix

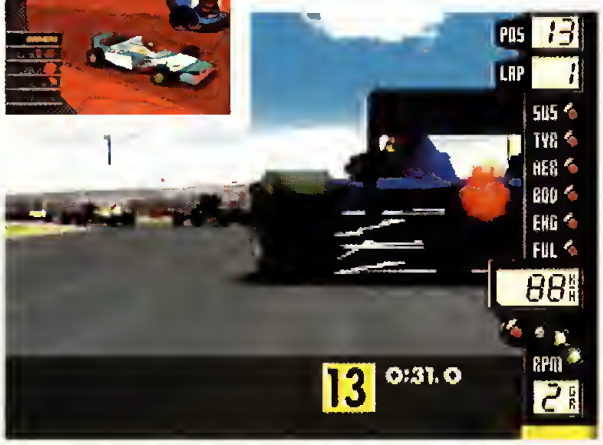
Oh look, another N64 racing game. Can Paradigm's title rise above the sea of mediocrity that previous efforts have wallowed in?

Tracks are more organic than those in previous titles, mimicking their real-life counterparts right down to the paid advertisers

Paradigm, known for *PilotWings 64*, is no stranger to simulation games. After all, the company got its start developing simulations for the U.S. military. But now, the company is turning its simulation expertise to the 1997 World Grand Prix calendar.

The game will feature 17 authentic tracks and 11 race teams. There will be five gameplay modes, including a full simulation of the 1997 Grand Prix season and World Grand Prix circuit

Adding to the gameplay will be six selectable camera views. There will also be the expected extras, like a time trial option to practice each track as well as varying weather conditions.



Selecting and configuring your car for optimal performance is one of the most important factors in winning a race

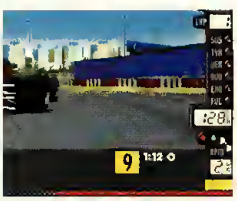
The game will feature 17 authentic tracks

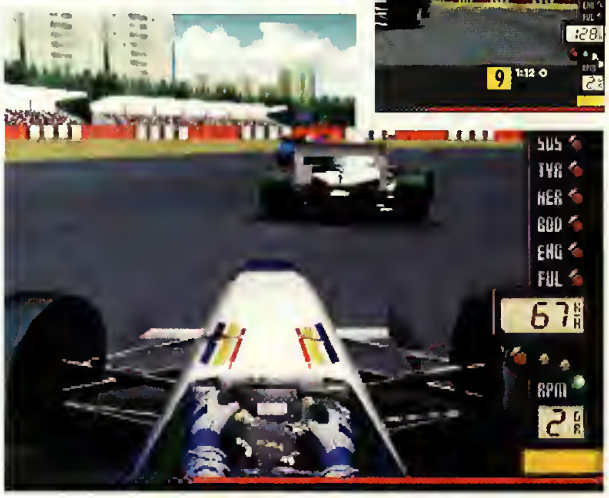
The game should also be the first on a console to feature head-tracking around curves (previously seen in Microsoft's *CART Racing*). In addition, *World Grand Prix* will have full steering wheel controller support to make negotiating turns easier and a smart camera system that enables players to navigate from optimal viewing angles.

Format:	Nintendo 64
Publisher:	Video System
Developer:	Paradigm Entertainment
Release Date:	July 1998
Origin:	U.S.

Opponent AI should be fairly tough, as other drivers will anticipate players' actions rather than just react to surrounding conditions.

WGP introduces other new elements to the N64 racing genre too, including, most impressively, Factor 5's much-touted speech compression technology, which lets developers pack up to 15 minutes of speech in 1MB of memory. Speech is used in the game for pit crew communications as well as updates of track conditions and car status. The ability to change the motion model is another advanced feature, dividing the game into three categories: Beginner (with driver assistance like auto-braking), Expert (with customized control), and Simulation (a total racing simulation). Of course, *WGP* also adopts some of the best features from other successful racers, including a photo-realistic replay mode with racing logos and billboards a la PlayStation's *Gran Turismo*.





Driving from a first-person perspective should be much more palatable thanks to a new camera system that gives players peripheral vision

Open wheel racing fans have yet to find much to be happy about on N64 — *F1 Pole Position* elicited more cries of pain than shouts of joy. But despite the fact that racing games compose the most crowded genre on N64, *World Grand Prix* should find a good-sized niche for itself, especially since the versions we have played have more in common, quality-wise, with Paradigm's excellent *PilotWings* than its disappointing *Aero Fighters Assault*.

Classic oval tracks based on authentic locations may be good for first-time racers who want to get used to the performance of their vehicle before venturing onto more complex tracks

LightWave 3D 5.5

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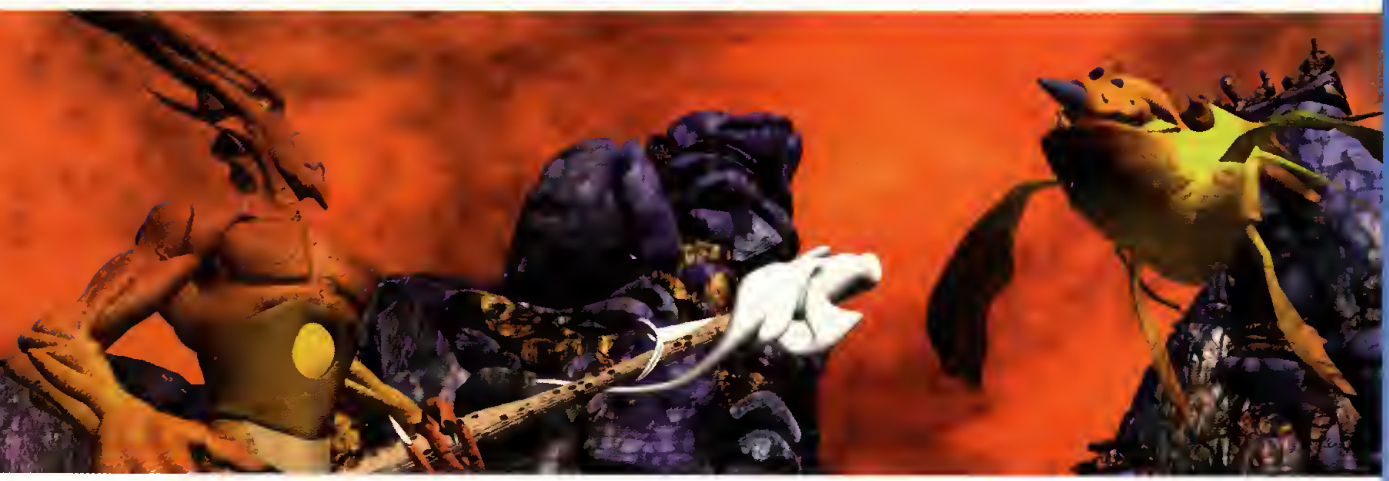

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Paul Davies is a Senior Animator for Red Orb Entertainment, a Division of Broderbund Software, Inc. Their latest project is an upcoming real-time strategy game called "Warbreeds."

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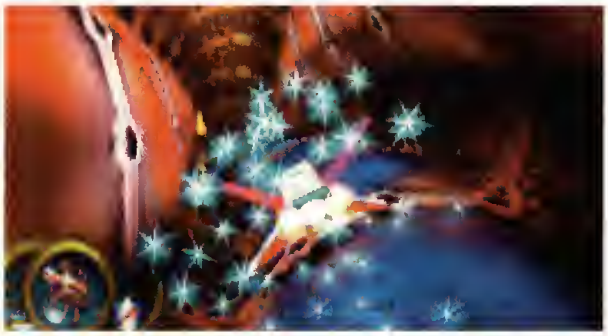
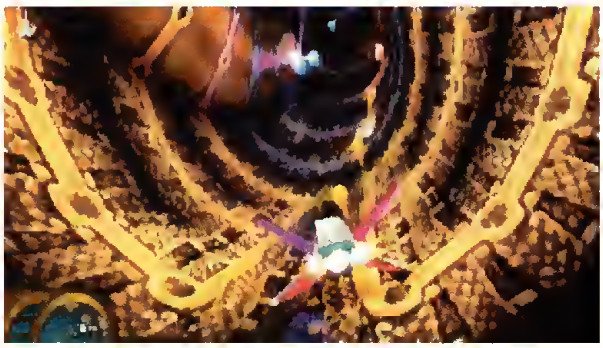
N20: Nitrous Oxide

Old-school shooters are to current gaming what earth shoes are to spiked heels. Does anyone want to go back to simpler days?

A strong stomach may be required at times when the sensation of speed becomes too effective

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	Fox Interactive
Developer:	Fox Interactive
Release Date:	June 1998
Origin:	U.S.





Tunnels behave as if they are alive, squeezing the player into tight situations (top), and then expanding into larger areas (above)

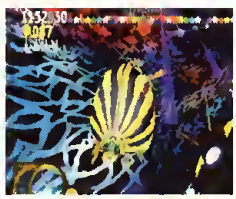
Why do people still play classic games? Not because of the graphics, certainly. Instead, it is the simplicity of control and ability to exploit a limited world that keep games like *Galaga* fresh. Even Nintendo President Hiroshi Yamauchi has criticized the complexity of today's games, blaming developers for making them less fun. Fox Interactive seems to have listened. *N20: Nitrous Oxide* is its attempt to revive the days of quick reflexes and high scores.

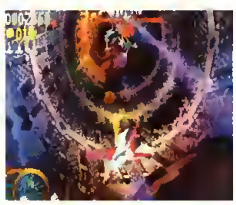
The game features 35 one- or two-player levels. Selecting one of four craft, players fly down a series of tunnels that shrink and expand in reaction to events in the game. To increase their speed, players blast enemies, prompting the release of nitrous oxide. There will be at least 14 different weapons to use on the game's more than 20 enemies.

Fans of *Tempest 2000* for Jaguar and the much underrated *Nanotek Warrior* for PlayStation will feel right at home with *N2O*'s psychedelic visuals, which include over-the-top explosions and club-style lighting effects. Fox also plans to enlist an as yet unnamed popular techno band, as well as include full analog controller support.

There is some question as to whether the no-brainer shooting genre can stand the test of time. *Nanotek Warrior* failed, but for reasons that could as easily be blamed on marketing as on the game itself.

Will the classic gameplay mechanism succeed? Fox has the benefit of learning from Virgin Interactive's experience. Hopefully, the company will provide the support needed to let the fate of *N20* rest solely on the gameplay.





Shooting at insect-like enemies increases the game's speed

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Silicon Valley

To date, only GameTek has done less for N64's Dream Team than DMA. Will *Silicon Valley* be worth the wait?

DMA, a champion of eclectic, innovative game concepts, was a natural choice for Nintendo's Dream Team. But with a track record that includes *Uniracers* for Super NES, *Hired Guns* for Amiga, the universal hit *Lemmings*, and more recently, the controversial *Grand Theft Auto*, DMA has a burden of expectation to live up to. **Next Generation** was recently invited to again see its long-awaited N64 project *Space Station Silicon Valley*, and impressions are very favorable.

Germinated in the fertile mind of DMA's "full-time guru" David Jones (now also creative director at parent company Gremlin Interactive), *Silicon Valley* requires the player to regain control of an ancient space station that has reappeared after a thousand-year absence. Complicating matters are the oddball descendants of the ship's Nanobots, created as part of the craft's experimental mission to make "living" robots.

In the millennia since the ship's disappearance in 2050, the Nanobots have evolved into forms that will go down in history as some of the strangest game characters to have originated from designers operating within the Western Hemisphere. Players will be confronted by a menagerie of mind-bending, acidic scope, from dancing sheep and flying dogs to juggling bears and rocket-wielding foxes.

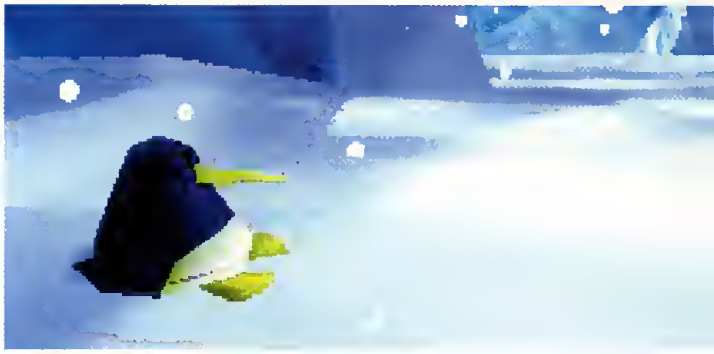
Once an impressively specced battle droid (dubbed EVO), the player's character begins the game in the denuded form of a box of chips following an unfortunate encounter with the space station's surviving defenses. What makes *Silicon Valley* particularly

Format:	Nintendo 64
Publisher:	Gremlin
Developer:	DMA Design
Release Date:	Winter 1998
Origin:	U.K.

In *Silicon Valley*, an oddball group called the Nanobots complicates the mission of the player

There won't be many games with characters to rival those of Space Station Silicon Valley

Despite their polygon nature, the characters still exude much charisma



Snow-themed sections may not scream originality, but DMA will doubtless offer a surprise or two to prevent predictability

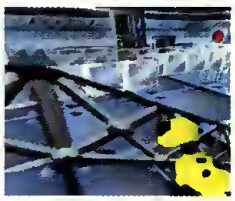
interesting is that this rather less than impressive package can still be used to seize control of all of the game's creatures and their abilities. Gamers with long memories (and good taste) will doubtless recall Andrew Braybrook's 8- and 16-bit classic *Paradroid*, which featured a similar gameplay system. DMA's Brian Baglow concurs with this comparison, although he adds, "*Paradroid* didn't allow you to kill sheep or catch flies with your tongue."

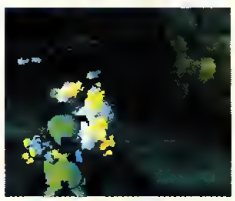
The space station's cavernous interior has afforded the designers room to breathe. *Silicon Valley* boasts 30 levels spread over five distinct environments: EuroEden, Arctic, Jungle, Desert, and finally, the ship's control room. Following the *GTA* precedent, there will be a number of submissions within each stage. Completing all these peripheral tasks in addition to the levels proper will reveal a set of extra stages, and given the cartridge's 64Mbit (8MB) size, there is reasonable scope for *Silicon Valley* to contain as rich a variety of locales and creatures as *Mario 64*

The team at DMA is worried that ***Silicon Valley*** will be perceived as a kids' game. Wonder why ...

Silicon Valley's colorful visuals might cause it to be pigeonholed alongside Nintendo's traditional, cutesy, inoffensive fare. However, Baglow doesn't necessarily agree with that view. "Some people will see this as a kid's game simply because it doesn't have a rocket launcher and heads bouncing off walls. They're wrong — *Silicon Valley* has a very, very twisted storyline that will definitely appeal to a grown-up audience. I'm not going to tell you exactly what it is, though ..."

The enigma that Baglow is so keen to preserve right now will be exposed later this year, most likely at E3. The nine-person development team is optimistic that *Silicon Valley* will be one of next Christmas' must-have titles; based on initial impressions, **Next Generation** sees little reason to doubt this assertion.





It's not surprising that some of the action takes place indoors

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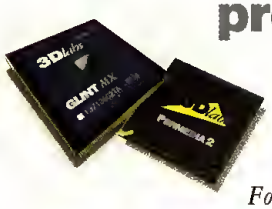

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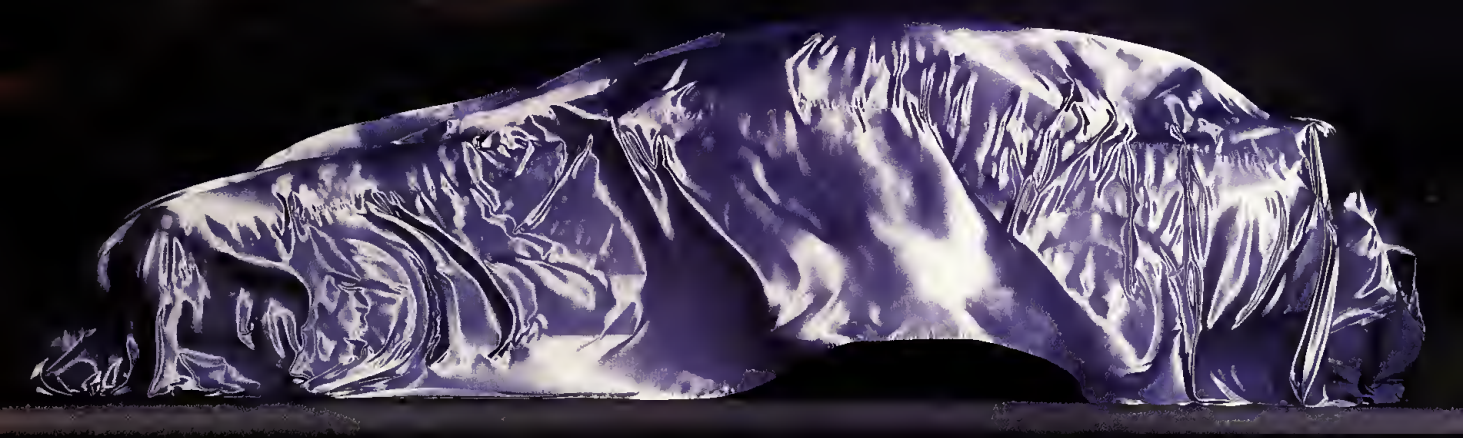

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The way games ought to be...

In search of the future of gameplay

by **Neil West**

Neil West is **Next Generation**'s editor-at-large

Presumed innocent

Once again, politicians are on the hunt for the big, bad videogame. Once again, videogames are being blamed for the "scourge of violence" that seems to permeate society in 1998.* And, once again, voice is being given to the argument that if we could just get rid of videogames, kids would grow up the way adults want 'em to, and life could be like "the good old days" (see "Outlawed in Orlando," page 16). The scene for videogaming's trial is now Florida. The politicians pointing fingers and threatening legislation are new to the debate. But the knee-jerk accusations and half-baked rationalizations being used are the same, tired histrionics we've heard time and time before.

I don't believe that Senator Grant and House Representative Silver will manage to force through any law that seriously affects videogaming's future. With no legal precedent or hard evidence to back up their accusations, another verdict of "Not Guilty!" seems inevitable. Besides, the proposed bills are neither as potent nor as sweeping as the IDSA would have us believe (the IDSA, as with any special interest group, occasionally needs to justify its own existence). All this is good because I don't believe that videogames are guilty of all the crimes of which they stand accused.

But I don't believe they are 100% innocent, either.

Sure, most of the arguments used to attack violent videogames can be easily countered. And in most instances, a mere cursory examination of the facts absolves videogames of blame. Even in the more conjectural areas of debate, common sense errs towards concluding that videogames are no more or less "harmful" than the violence seen on TV or at the movies, read about in books, or taught in history class at school.

But, to my mind at least, there are a couple of little niggling doubts that won't go away. There are a couple of reasons why I think videogames need to change before they can be completely absolved of all guilt. Let's follow a typical argument through and see where we end up:

Prosecution: Violence is a bad thing. We should try and stamp out violence as and when it appears in all areas of society.

Defense: Violence, unfortunately, is a part of being human. Society's best hope isn't to try and stamp it out, but rather to accept it and channel it as best we can.

Prosecution: No way, pinko. It's been proven that watching violent movies feeds a hunger and makes children more violent in real life. Therefore, it's reasonable to assume that violent videogames have the same effect.

Defense: Actually, the link between exposure to violent movies and real-life violence has never been proven. All that's known is that watching violence raises kids' adrenaline levels, and they get excited and rowdy in the short term. Then, as far as we know, he or she goes back to normal.

Remember, we're not talking about kids pretending to be a ninja after watching a Jackie Chan movie, or even kids being inspired to go learn martial arts for a few years. We're talking about the claim that on a deep, fundamental level, violent videogames change kids into more aggressive people. That's a pretty beefy accusation.

But I don't believe videogames are 100% innocent, either

Prosecution: OK, it's never been proven. But it's common sense, right?

Defense: Not necessarily — maybe it helps to let off a little steam in front of the TV instead of with another human being. Besides, what about Shakespeare and fairy tales? Have you considered that it might be the idea of violence — and not necessarily its visual depiction — that does the psychological damage?

Prosecution: Um, you have to start somewhere. And just because Uzis are more dangerous than handguns doesn't mean you shouldn't try and ban handguns, right?

Defense: Now who's the pinko? Besides, you might be barking up the wrong tree altogether. What about news footage of wars and murders? What about documentaries involving real-world violence? Many experts argue that this is the stuff that really affects kids, not the fictional stuff.

Prosecution: OK, two points. First, this real stuff has some rational, educational value — and the benefits of knowing what's going on in the world are obvious. There's no value to videogames. Second, when watching the news or a violent movie, kids are just observers. When they're playing a videogame, they become participants and perpetrators of violence.

This has to make their effects more damaging.

Defense: Actually, these two observations lead to the same defense of videogaming. First, the idea that there's no rational value to videogames — you can say the same of kids playing Cowboys and Indians in backyards all over America. Where's the "rational value" in that? Second, kids are participants — sure. They actually get to play in a fantasy world as opposed to simply watching one.

But these two threads lead to the same point — and the word "play" is key. Videogames have replaced the backyard as a place where kids "grow up." Kids will always play and experiment with violence, and — in the words of MIT professor Henry Jenkins — videogames "provide an environment that kids can enter into, interact with and explore, and do many of the things that they traditionally did in the backyard, the empty field, or down by the river in Mark Twain's Mississippi."

Prosecution: OK, but videogames don't totally replace the backyard. And only because this is what they're being used for doesn't mean that they're fit for the job. If a kid is confronted by a bully in the backyard, he can run away, joke his way out of trouble, call for help, form an alliance with other smaller kids to stick together, threaten the bully with telling his mom or teacher. Maybe he could even become friends with the bully. The point is that there are many alternatives to fighting, and a kid learns lessons about life depending upon which option he chooses.

In a videogame, violence is the only option. There's only one lesson to learn.

Defense: Um, oh dear. You're right.

And this is where I come to when thinking about the issue. Videogaming's problems come down to the fact that most of them are just so one-dimensional. They don't come close to re-creating the breadth and range of options and experiences that make life so much fun. The worry is that this not only robs videogames of potential entertainment value but also — and I'm loathe to say it — maybe even makes them in some way harmful to certain kids deprived of the normal love, care, and attention that they should experience in other areas of life.

I made this point a year ago. I make it again now because nothing's changed. Next month, however, I plan to introduce a woman who thinks she may know a way forward. Prepare to meet another MIT egghead, Senior Research Scientist Janet Murray....

What's your opinion?

Who knows? What do you think? Maybe I've been playing too much *Mortal Kombat* and my reasoning's shot.

Email theway@next-generation.com

*** Actually, according to many studies, violent crime has gone down significantly in the last five years. An article in the *New York Times* even suggested that videogames may have played a factor in this. More likely, however, the decrease in violence is a result of a stronger economy and a better job market.**

ARMY MEN

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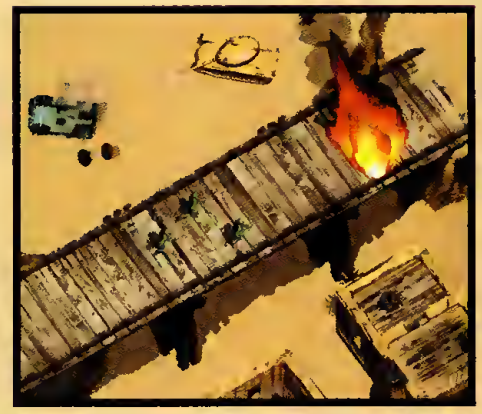

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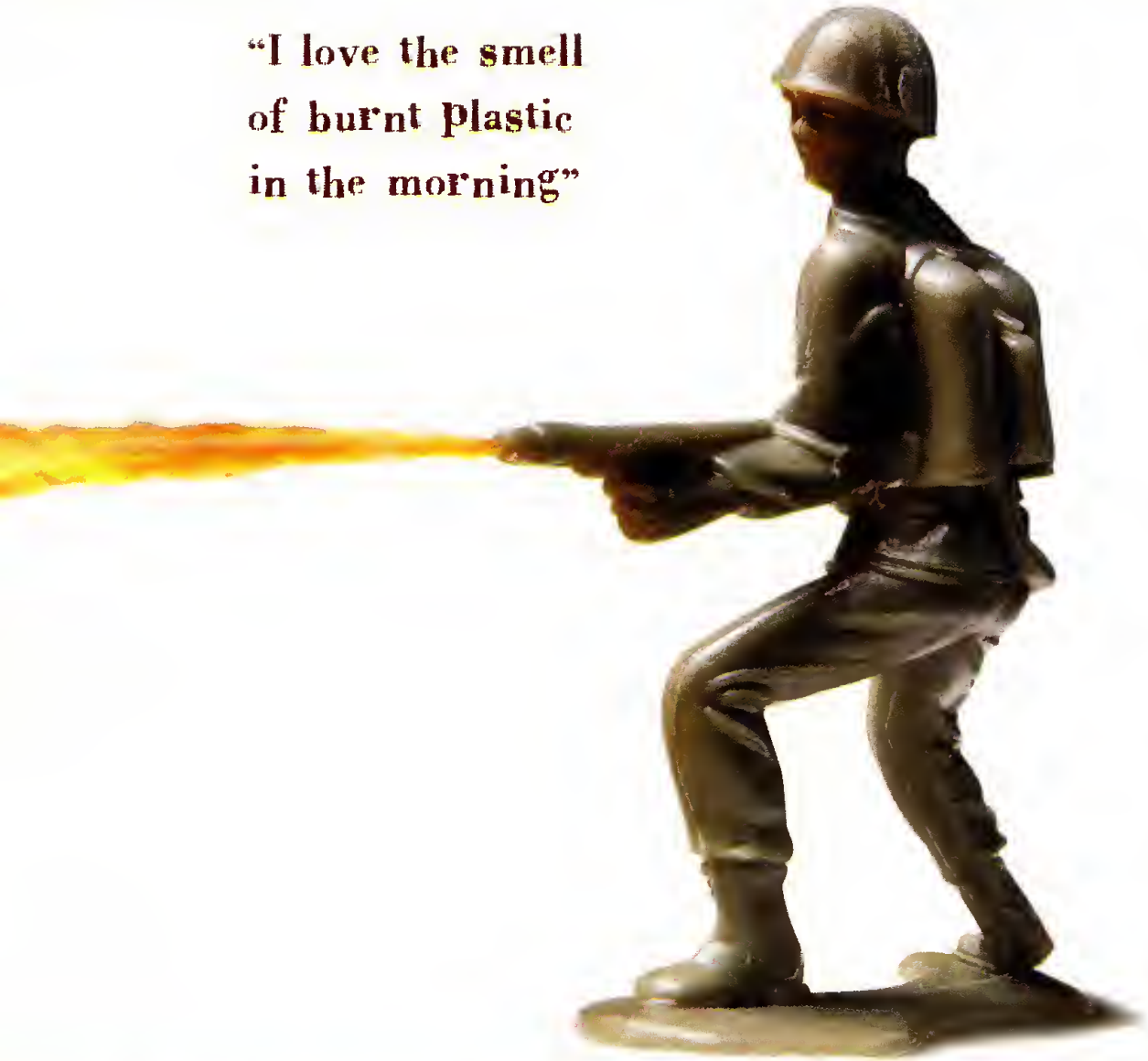

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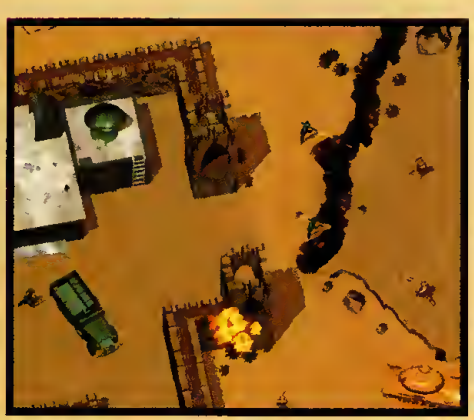

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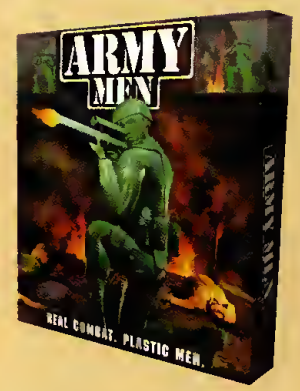

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finals

Reviews that put all the fun into life

108	Nintendo 64
110	PlayStation
112	Saturn
112	PC
116	Online

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★★★★★ **Revolutionary**
Brilliantly conceived and flawlessly executed; a new high watermark.

★★★★ **Excellent**
A high-quality and inventive new game. Either a step forward for an existing genre or a successful attempt at creating a new one.

★★★ **Good**
A solid and competitive example of an established game style.

★★ **Average**
Perhaps competent — certainly uninspired.

★ **Bad**
Crucially flawed in design or application.

Denotes a review appearing on the **Next Generation Disc**

Denotes a review of a Japanese product.

Nintendo 64

NBA in the Zone 64
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **Konami**

When Konami first announced it was porting *In the Zone* to N64, it piqued the interest of videogame basketball fans everywhere. After all, *ITZ 2* is still the best-playing arcade basketball game around, and the amazing *International Superstar Soccer 64* proved what Konami could do with a sports title on N64. However, what we wound up with is a travesty of a game that has not only tarnished Konami's reputation but also managed to make N64 look bad.

The criticism of *ITZ 64* begins and ends with graphics that look appalling and could even lead to blindness. The dreaded anti-aliased blur of N64 games rears its ugly head once again but has been taken to an all-new, dreadful extreme. We've seen anti-aliasing set on "high" before, but this approaches black magic — the game should come with a pair of prescription lenses or at least a coupon for 70 bucks off on a pair, just to make up for the money wasted on the cartridge.

Granted, *ITZ 64* is the only five-on-five hoops game currently available for N64, but even hardcore basketball fans should take this occasion to remember that patience is a virtue and wait for something better. Even if one looks past the graphics, the play doesn't compare favorably with any other b-ball game on the market. The pace is slow (imagine five-on-five between two-legged tortoises played underwater), and control can be charitably described as "mushy." Add in a porous defensive AI and you've got the icing on a very blurry cake. Alas, it seemed so promising.

Rating: ★

Known around the NG office as *Blur Ball*, *In the Zone 64* takes Konami a major step backwards

Olympic Hockey '98
Publisher: **Midway Home Entertainment**
Developer: **Treyarch**

Imagine Midway took the tired *Gretzky* engine, added Olympic uniforms, replaced trading with "defections," and released it without tweaking anything but the default ring size. Well, you don't have to imagine because Midway did it. A waste of plastic and silicon.

Rating: ★

Quake 64
Publisher: **Midway Home Entertainment**
Developer: **Id Software**

We're happy to report that *Quake 64* is an exception to the rule that PC to console ports usually don't work.

Visually, *Quake 64* is one of the better-looking N64 games to come from a third party. Anti-aliasing still results in slightly blurry visuals, but it is a far cry from the filtering overkill exhibited in a number of N64 titles. There is even an option to turn off filtering entirely, which, frankly, makes the game look and move even better. *Quake 64* is still a long way off from a version running on a high-end, 3D-accelerated PC, but it does feature a decent frame rate, and the usual N64 handicap of not featuring enough texture variety isn't much of an issue — *Quake* doesn't really have much in the way of texture variety anyway.

In terms of the one-player game, *Quake 64* offers the same gameplay experience that PC gamers have come to love. *Quake* purists may notice some changes to some levels (missing secrets and the like), but the differences are negligible, and there is little reason to complain. Save the complaints for game control. *Quake* veterans who like using the mouse/look technique will be disappointed. Despite the fact that every button on the controller can be custom set, a satisfactory control setting is difficult to find without some aiming or mobility compromise. Default setting "B" approximates a control system similar to that found in *Turok*, but even here, the N64 controller's analog stick is overly sensitive and lacking in precision. There is a sensitivity setting option, but reducing sensitivity results in a slow-down in control response. The control compromise will affect "stop and fire" novices the least, but advanced players will be longing for the PC keyboard/mouse setup as well as moves like the circle strafe and rocket jumps.

Multiplayer games have always been the most appealing aspect of *Quake*, and *Quake 64* offers a credible two-player, split-screen game with deathmatch levels. A four-player game would have been nice, but this would invariably have meant a reduced frame rate and a tiny view screen.

As a whole, *Quake 64* doesn't live up to the experience offered by the high-end, 3D-accelerated PC version, it is, however, an entertaining gaming experience that is worthy of a close look and a nice addition to the blossoming number of first-person shooters for Nintendo 64.

Rating: ★★★

The console *Quake* still can't match the PC experience, but *Quake 64* is the best to date

Rampage World Tour
Publisher: **Midway**
Developer: **Game Refuge**

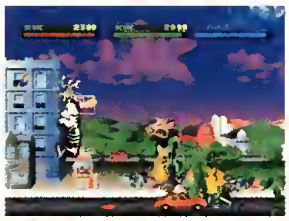
Rampage World Tour for N64 is a good example of a poor retread. The original arcade *Rampage*, which enabled players to control one of three giant monsters, smashing cities and eating the hapless citizenry, was an outstanding cooperative multiplayer game and a fairly entertaining single-player experience. But in its quest for a buck, Midway has given gamers a new version of *Rampage* that's essentially the same version as the original with prettier graphics.

There are some good things about the game. The graphics are nice, the sound effects are good, and there are lots of bonuses to eat and hidden characters

to play. Unlike the PlayStation version, gamers can have a three-player bout of *Rampage* with Lizzie, George, and Ralph all demolishing buildings at once. In fact, the three-player mode is what keeps the game from being a complete washout — getting together with two friends to take down Peoria, Illinois, is actually quite a bit of fun. Unfortunately, the single-player experience is painfully repetitive, lacking the social and competitive dynamics that are about the only reason the multiplayer game has any appeal.

Of all the games in Midway's library, it's unfortunate it chose *Rampage* to update, especially in so lazy a fashion. It's clear no thought went into the game whatsoever — for instance, where's the fully 3D cityscape to wade through? Despite the three-player mode, no amount of graphic flash or nostalgia can improve a style of gameplay whose day has passed.

Rating: ★★



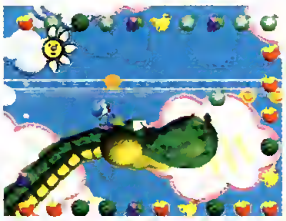
***Rampage World Tour* for N64 is a so-so port of a disappointing update of a not bad game**

Yoshi's Story

Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Nintendo**

Originally designed as a sophisticated follow-up to *Yoshi's Island*, this game finds itself in the embarrassing position of being a sort of *Yoshi* Lite. Gone is the sophisticated puzzle aspect of the original, and instead, we have an admittedly pretty but ultimately shallow children's game.

The original was the brainchild of Shigeru Miyamoto, but this 64-bit sequel was handled by a different team, and it shows. Players simply guide Yoshi around the simplistic levels collecting fruit. "Exploration" generally involves heading up and right, and "puzzles" seldom deviate from finding a weak spot on a bigger opponent.



***Yoshi's Story* is too easy, too short, and too expensive to be a smart buy**

Graphically, the mixture of rendered and hand-drawn art is refreshing. Wonderful animation and beautifully realized characters abound. The music is either a surreal work of art or a tortuous sonic calamity, depending on your age/sanity/level of pretension. It has been designed with young N64 owners in mind, and with that as a starting point, the game does have a lot to offer children. It's easy to access, simple to play, and easy to play through.

In fact, reasonable players will finish this on day one — and therein lies the problem. As with all N64 games, this is an expensive proposition, and even the biggest *Yoshi*-phile will have to think seriously about spending more than fifty bucks for a few hours of entertainment. Its real value is mostly as a library piece for obsessive *Mario* collectors.

Yoshi's Story could have been a renaissance for side-scrollers. Instead, it sounds more like a death knell.

Rating: ★★

Nintendo 64

Fight me

Well, it may not be the prettiest brawler on the block, but there's finally a decent fighting game for N64

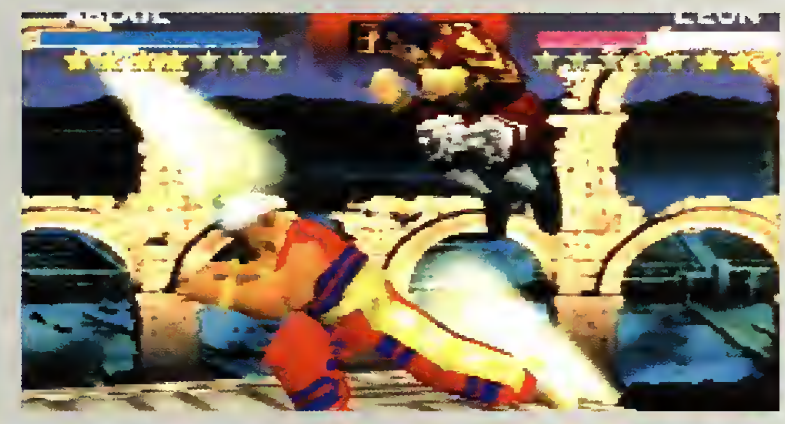
Fighters Destiny

Publisher: **Ocean**
Developer: **Imagineer**

Face it, N64 has been plagued by pathetic fighting games — period. Which is why we're happy to report that *Fighters Destiny*, which would be a welcome addition to any console, is a standout on N64. The game builds on the rapid hand-to-hand combat pioneered by *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* without being too derivative, the most obvious departure from tradition being its point system. Winning a match requires the fighter to achieve seven points through any combination of ring outs, knockdowns, and special moves. Simply taking an opponent's health bar down won't necessarily yield a point; instead, fighters may become weak and can attempt to evade your strikes as they recover.

Fighters Destiny showcases a wide variety of fighting styles, with different characters emphasizing everything from aerial attacks to pro wrestling moves. Controls are well-thought-out and amazingly easy. Movement is controlled by the D-pad, and there are only two attack buttons: punch and kick. Despite the simple setup, many different moves can be pulled off with a combination of taps on the D-pad and attack buttons. The shoulder buttons function as block and evade moves and are essential to a successful strategy.

Unfortunately, the graphics don't quite live up to the gameplay. There are some nice special effects and background animations, but the character design is uninspired. There's also quite a bit of visible texture seaming in the characters' joints.



Despite the uninspired character design, *Fighters Destiny* is the best fighting game for Nintendo 64

But despite these few graphical flaws, *Fighters Destiny* is hands-down the best fighter on Nintendo 64. Mastering the fighting techniques of each character is a challenge, and the depth of the single-player game is impressive. Until the arrival of *Tekken 3* for PlayStation, *Fighters Destiny* is the fighting game to play.

Rating: ★★★★

rating

PlayStation

Bloody Roar
Publisher: **SCEA**
Developer: **Hudson**

Bloody Roar is perhaps the ultimate amalgamation of fighting games, with just enough original ideas to justify its purchase. Fans of *Tekken*, *Virtua Fighter*, *Fighting Vipers*, and almost every other 3D fighter will find enough familiar elements in *Bloody Roar* to be immediately comfortable with its fighting system. The unique element that makes *Bloody Roar* stand out from the rest is the ability of each of the eight playable characters to transform into an alter ego beast that has even more moves. The limit on this ability

Bloody Roar houses a solid fighting engine, but it's too derivative to stand out more

is that characters can only change when their "beast-meter" is full, and repeated pummeling from an opponent will change them back to human form.

Bloody Roar really excels at combining and even improving on known gameplay paradigms. While there is a large number of extravagant combos, almost any attack is reversible or at least escapable, which makes the game very fluid and dynamic, much like Square's extraordinary *Tobal 2*. Even 3D movement is user selectable, so the game can be played in either a 3D or 2D fighting mode.

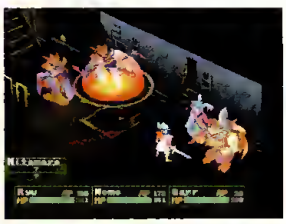
The only disadvantage is *Bloody Roar*'s distinct lack of personality. All of the characters are kind of generic, and their storylines are equally uninteresting. Having only eight playable characters is also a bit thin in this day and age, but while none stands out, at least each is different enough that this isn't really a problem. Overall, *Bloody Roar* has solid gameplay and excellent graphics, even if it doesn't have any sense of style. And we'll take raw gameplay over style on any day.

Rating: ★★★★

Breath of Fire III
Developer: **Capcom**
Publisher: **Capcom**

Square's *Final Fantasy VII* pushed the envelope by combining state-of-the-art visuals and a mammoth world in an RPG. But for some role-playing fans, the polygonal characters and prerendered backgrounds didn't necessarily make the game any better than a superbly crafted 16-bit RPG. Capcom seems to have created the answer for those fans with *Breath of Fire III*, a solid showcase of traditional RPG elements and minor touches of 32-bit charm.

The game follows the journey of a half-human, half-dragon warrior named Ryu, who begins the game as an abandoned dragon pup at the bottom of a bustling mine. As the game progresses, Ryu is joined by other characters who are pursuing different goals but end up fighting for the same purpose: to learn about the mysterious past of their world



Breath of Fire III has more than enough story and character to make up for a lack of polygons

and find the answers to Ryu's origins. It's a stock RPG storyline involving age-old conflicts and quasi-medieval technology, but the things that make *BOF III*'s thematic content stand out are the excellent translation of the dialogue (done with humor and precision — a pleasant surprise after the utterly botched *BOF II*), as well as superbly developed characters. While the story and characters are sure to draw gamers in, *BOF III*'s graphics and mechanics are also complex and detailed enough to compete with high-end RPGs like *Wild Arms* and *Final Fantasy VII*.

Each of the main characters in the game has been painstakingly hand drawn, then converted to sprites to achieve a very personalized feel. Though character design seems suspiciously similar to Capcom's other game series, *Street Fighter*, the result in an RPG is unique. The CD technology also enables some very effective use of voice samples during battle and a massively detailed world to explore. Environments resemble those in *Final Fantasy Tactics* and are constructed of texture-mapped polygons, which give dungeons more depth and necessitate the use of the game's manual camera controls so that players can peek around walls and down narrow passages for hidden items or characters.

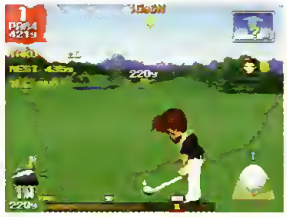
The only real weaknesses within the game are occasional slow-downs during combat and a bizarre "light jazz" soundtrack. Not exactly the kind of music one would expect in such a cleverly constructed RPG, but it's bearable and occasionally catchy, and it nicely underscores an engaging storyline and solid characters. Add in a complex set of secrets, side quests that don't distract, and a highly entertaining fishing sub-game, and *Breath of Fire III* is more than matched against the new breed of visually flashy RPGs on the market.

Rating: ★★★★

Hot Shots Golf
Publisher: **Sony Computer Entertainment**
Developer: **Sony (Japan)**

While American sports developers and publishers have been busy coming up with enough cash to buy the Tiger Woods license (EA got it), Sony of Japan has managed to create the first golf game since the early *PGA Tour Golf*s that is actually fun.

The finely crafted engine of *Hot Shots Golf* manages to put together polygonal graphics, new camera angles, and a simplified swing meter in one sensational package that puts other PlayStation golf games to shame. The addition of an 18-hole miniature golf course just rounds out this deep and immediately playable golf game.



The big-headed golfers look funny, but the play in _Hot Shots Golf_ is seriously addictive

Unfortunately, the big-headed golfers and secret characters seem to be geared to appeal to fighting game fans and are likely to turn off any real golf aficionados. However, it's just the type of golf game that's sure to liven up any PlayStation party and be enjoyed by gamers and golf fans alike.

Rating: ★★★★

Newman/Haas Racing
Publisher: **Psygnosis**
Developer: **Studio 33**

With an excellent racing game track record (i.e. the *Wipeout* and *Formula 1* series), it comes as a bit of a surprise that Psygnosis seems to be playing the "slap on a license" game that is usually attributed to lesser publishers. CART racing is more popular than Formula 1 racing in the United States, and in an apparent effort to cash in on this fact, Psygnosis has snapped up the license for one of CART's more popular race teams and produced a game featuring an eclectic collection of tracks and drivers from the race series. The real trouble here is that Sony possesses the actual CART license, used in its *CART World Series* game. Casual gamers may neither care nor notice, but hardcore racing enthusiasts will be disappointed at the less than comprehensive nature of the game, which will prevent them from re-creating an authentic CART season.

Graphically, with its drab, unattractive textures and substandard smoke effects, *Newman/Haas Racing* doesn't live up to the standards set by the *Formula 1* series. The cars themselves are nicely modeled, but the overall visuals are marred by aliasing jaggies and draw-in problems. The sound effects are adequate, but the music is generic and the commentary featuring ESPN/ABC commentator Bob Varsha and former Indy car champ Danny Sullivan is repetitive and adds little to the game besides annoyance.

The gameplay experience is on par with the *Formula 1* series experience, which is, compared to its competitors,

An adequate console racing game, _Newman/Haas Racing_ offers little beyond _Formula 1_

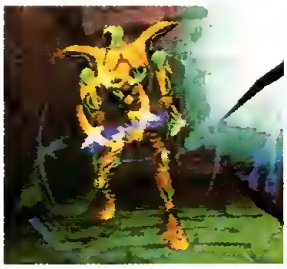
superior. Control is above average in digital mode and even better in analog mode, although the sensitivity takes a little getting used to. *Newman/Haas*' AI does a good job of modeling the driving characteristics of real-life drivers but isn't significantly better at this than other racing games. Depthwise the game is satisfying, with 16 drivers, 11 tracks (two ovals, four street circuits, and five road courses), and three one-player modes ranging from single race to championship to challenge (the player versus a single computer-driven car). The only notable feature of the two-player, split-screen mode is the inclusion of four AI cars, which heighten the overall competitive level.

Judged purely as a racing game, *Newman/Haas* offers enough to make it one of the better examples of the genre,

but considering that Psygnosis' *F1* games have offered a similar experience for some time now, the game can only be considered a disappointment.
Rating: ★★

Shadow Master
Publisher: **Psygnosis**
Developer: **Hammerhead**

Maybe Psygnosis should stay away from the word "shadow." This game has more in common with the bad old days of *Shadow of the Beast* than the Psygnosis that brought us *G.Police*. There's no reason it should've released this except for a lesson in humility. The game is graphically slick, but the gameplay and level design are a monument to mediocrity (not unlike *Shadow of the Beast*).



Shadow Master's enemy design is about as exciting as watching action figures waddle

Shadow Master plays like an upscale counterfeit of Core Design's already lackluster *Machinehead*. The two are eerily similar in both control and general feel, although Psygnosis' version has a slicker interface. However, *Shadow Master* isn't paced as well, with muddily defined objectives and no navigational map. Level layout is messy, and getting lost is as big a hazard as enemy fire.

Graphics remain the company's strongest department, and *Shadow Master* (graphic design by album cover guru Rodney Matthews) comes with all the hallmark Psygnosis specialties — light sourcing, special effects, and top-notch graphic design. Unfortunately, the graphics engine, with ugly polygon glitching, seaming, and a quirky auto-aim feature, not only destroys the visual appeal, but also hampers gameplay.

Is this playable? Yes. Desirable? No. Everything about *Shadow Master* screams "second rate." Pass on it and wait for the Psygnosis "A" team to publish its next title.
Rating: ★

PlayStation

Hustled

Bust-A-Move
Publisher: **Enix**
Developer: **Enix**

Here they come, the *PaRappa* clones — the first one out of the gate, however, is in some ways better than the game it's patterned after

After the monstrous success of *PaRappa the Rapper* in Japan, it was only a matter of time before clones would start to surface. But while the button-pressing concept of *Bust-A-Move* is certainly a throwback to our favorite hip-hop hero, the game manages to expand and improve on many elements of *PaRappa*'s gameplay.

Bust-A-Move (no relation to the excellent Taito action/puzzle games released a few years back) is about dancing. Really. There are 10 playable characters (plus several secret characters), who all have different dance styles and moves that are controlled by pressing certain buttons to the rhythm of the music. Whereas *PaRappa* utilized the four buttons on the PlayStation pad plus the R1 and L1 buttons, *Bust-A-Move* uses certain directional pad movements along with button pushing. This allows the game to get progressively harder by simply adding more and more controller moves to every four beats of music. The game is also set up so there isn't much of a set path of movements, as in *PaRappa*. Different moves branch out into other moves, allowing for a greater freedom of style than previously seen.

Each of the fully 3D characters is unique and fun to watch, and the motion capture is superb. During each song players get a chance to dance a solo for even more points. As in *PaReppe*, the backgrounds change subtly, depending on how well the player performs

The graphics are fully 3D and look great. The motion capture in particular is flawless, with all of the dancers having a vast array of moves available to them. Styles range from street dancing to '80s-style popping to the outrageous disco mayhem of the '70s. Each character is entertaining to watch as well as to play.

A nice addition — missing from *PaRappa* — is the ability to match up with other players for a two-person dance-off. Just to liven things up, each player also has offensive moves that can be thrown at other players to slow them down, as well as the ability to dodge competitor's attacks.

Bust-A-Move is another fresh approach with simple gameplay that is both entertaining and addictive. The only thing that keeps it from scoring as well as *PaRappa* is its lack of both a storyline and some of the quirky personality that made *PaRappa* so lovable. If you can deal with that minor loss, *Bust-A-Move* is definitely an idea whose time has come, and it helps bridge the gap between hardcore gaming and mass culture appeal. It doesn't hurt that it's also a serious blast to play.
Rating: ★★★★

rating

Saturn

It flies

Azel: Panzer Dragoon Saga

Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Team Andromeda**

Sega's most beautiful game series spins in a new direction, leaving players both spellbound and wishing for more

To use a particularly horrid simile, if *Final Fantasy VII* is the Homo Sapiens of the RPG evolutionary scale, *Azel: Panzer Dragoon Saga* is the first of a breed of hybrid super-mutants. In adapting its popular *Panzer Dragoon* shooters to the RPG genre, Team Andromeda has created a game so mature beyond the current scene that other developers have barely begun to explore its conventions.

Azel uses an advanced form of the *Panzer Dragoon* shooter engine, enabling players to travel and explore in all three dimensions, a step above the traditional, flat-plane, track-based dynamics of the older games. Characters exist in a truly polygonal environment, using neither prerendered backgrounds nor sprite-based characters. In three dimensions, areas like the towers and caverns become real environments, not containers of floors.

Like the first two *Panzer* games, *Azel*'s graphic design is magnificent — few games match the series' distinctive atmosphere. This draws on the heritage established by the first two games but takes the dragon off the rails, giving characters the freedom to explore. Each area is so well-designed and feels so "right" that players will stop thinking in terms of maps and start navigating by landmarks.

The *Panzer Dragoon* series has always included the most graphically adept games on Saturn, and *Saga* drives the point home. The rail-based shooting of the first two games has been replaced by full 3D environments and 360° freedom of movement

The combat system builds upon the pseudo realtime systems pioneered by Square and brings itself closer to the feel of tactical combat, with reaction times and firing arcs adding new strategic spins. The battle is rich with options, from magic to dragon breath, so much so that a battle-hardened, clever player can triumph 90% of the time against the basic enemy AI without a scratch. (And no, this is not a criticism. It's possible, but not easy).

Unfortunately, the effort and time spent designing the game leaves *Azel* woefully short in terms of gameplay. At about 20 hours in length and with an overzealous use of FMV, it's much less than it should be, leaving the player wanting more and not getting it. As a result, it will be remembered as a game that was unique, trailblazing, and wonderful, but without the impact it could have had.

Rating: ★★★★

PC

Battlespire

Publisher: **Bethesda Softworks**
Developer: **Bethesda Softworks**

Bethesda's *Daggerfall* was acclaimed by some and cursed by many when first released. It was a huge advance in computer role-playing because players were given a huge world to explore at their whim. They could literally do just about anything. Unfortunately, *Daggerfall* suffered from a number of bugs that caused its popularity to wane quickly. Many wondered what *Daggerfall* would have been like with fewer bugs and a tighter story. Now they can find out with *Battlespire*, the latest chapter in the *Elder Scrolls* series.

Battlespire presents the player with an expansive, yet more focused quest. Unlike *Daggerfall*, in which players could do just about anything, *Battlespire* has a specific objective. This is by no means a bad thing — on the contrary, the focused quest is a definite plus for the series. By having an obvious goal, there is less aimless wandering and more adventuring involved.

The character creation system in *Battlespire* is detailed enough to please even the strictest of players. It's possible to jump into the game quickly with a predetermined character, or spend time creating a new one from scratch. Everything can be customized, down to facial features, and this level of detail is appreciated in a role-playing game because it gives the player a chance to create a unique character and not be stuck with a generic mold.

***Battlespire* is a *Daggerfall* spin-off that's shorter but in many ways more satisfying than the original**

Movement throughout the world is done in the first-person, not unlike *Quake*. While the total immersion attempt is appreciated and well-done, the *Battlespire* engine does not allow for hardware acceleration. It is software-only — definitely a limiting factor.

Battlespire is a great attempt to re-create the feel of a pen-and-paper RPG on the computer. Although the genre still has a long way to go before a computer can ever hope to match the creativeness of a live DM or the detail of a player's imagination, it is getting there. And *Battlespire* is a step in the right direction. While it might not be revolutionary, it is a solid release that should provide hours of dungeon-crawling fun. We anxiously await the next installment.

Rating: ★★★

Descent to Undermountain

Publisher: **Interplay**
Developer: **Interplay**

First shown more than two years ago, *Descent to Undermountain* is one of those titles that should have been allowed to die quietly. Or else it should have been sent back for a complete and total rewrite when it became clear technology passed it by, since the game is outdated from the moment you open the box.

The biggest problem lies with the game engine itself. Serving as the title's namesake, *Descent to Undermountain* runs on an updated version of the *Descent* engine. Not the 3D-accelerated, super-neato-keen version that was used for *Descent II*, but the DOS, software-only version of the *Descent* engine. It runs in SVGA, but the lack of hardware acceleration is unacceptable. As a result, the game is visually very weak.

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rating

PC

Good knight

Jedi Knight: Mysteries of the Sith

Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **LucasArts**

Less an expansion pack than a straight sequel, LucasArts shows that follow-ups don't have to be bad or boring

The derivative world of expansion packs is usually categorically ignored by **Next Generation** as representative of everything we loathe in games, but recent efforts like Rogue's *Dissolution of Eternity* for *Quake* have taken this purely profit-driven realm of software a step further in terms of quality and value. The new high standard of what a first-person action game expansion pack should do, though, is *Mysteries of the Sith*.

The usual expansion pack simply contains more of the same — token extra levels, weapons, enemies, and an unimaginative storyline. More often than not, they're hastily thrown together attempts to wring a few more bucks out of a franchise. Compared to these, *MOTS* can count as its peers such "expansion packs" as *C&C: Red Alert* and *Ultima VII: Serpent Isle*. Containing enough meat to qualify as a stand-alone game, *MOTS* was clearly a labor of love, which exceeds reasonable expansion pack expectations.

Like the above-mentioned games, *MOTS* takes its parent game a step further in terms of graphics, features, and most importantly, story. *MOTS* takes place five years after the defeat of supreme bad guy Jerec (you know he's evil because he wears an evil black blindfold) by the deadly, boring Kyle Katarn, who is threatening to single-handedly eclipse all the other *Star Wars* good guys in accomplishments. It also introduces a new playable character, Mara Jade, a Jedi-in-training appropriated from those freakish *Star Wars* novels. Kyle and Mara must work together to infiltrate a sinister Sith temple and discover the secrets it holds.

Searching high and low to come up with someone to fill in as the trendy girl hero, LucasArts dipped into the *Star Wars* novels and came up with Mara Jade. Not that we're complaining — just cynical

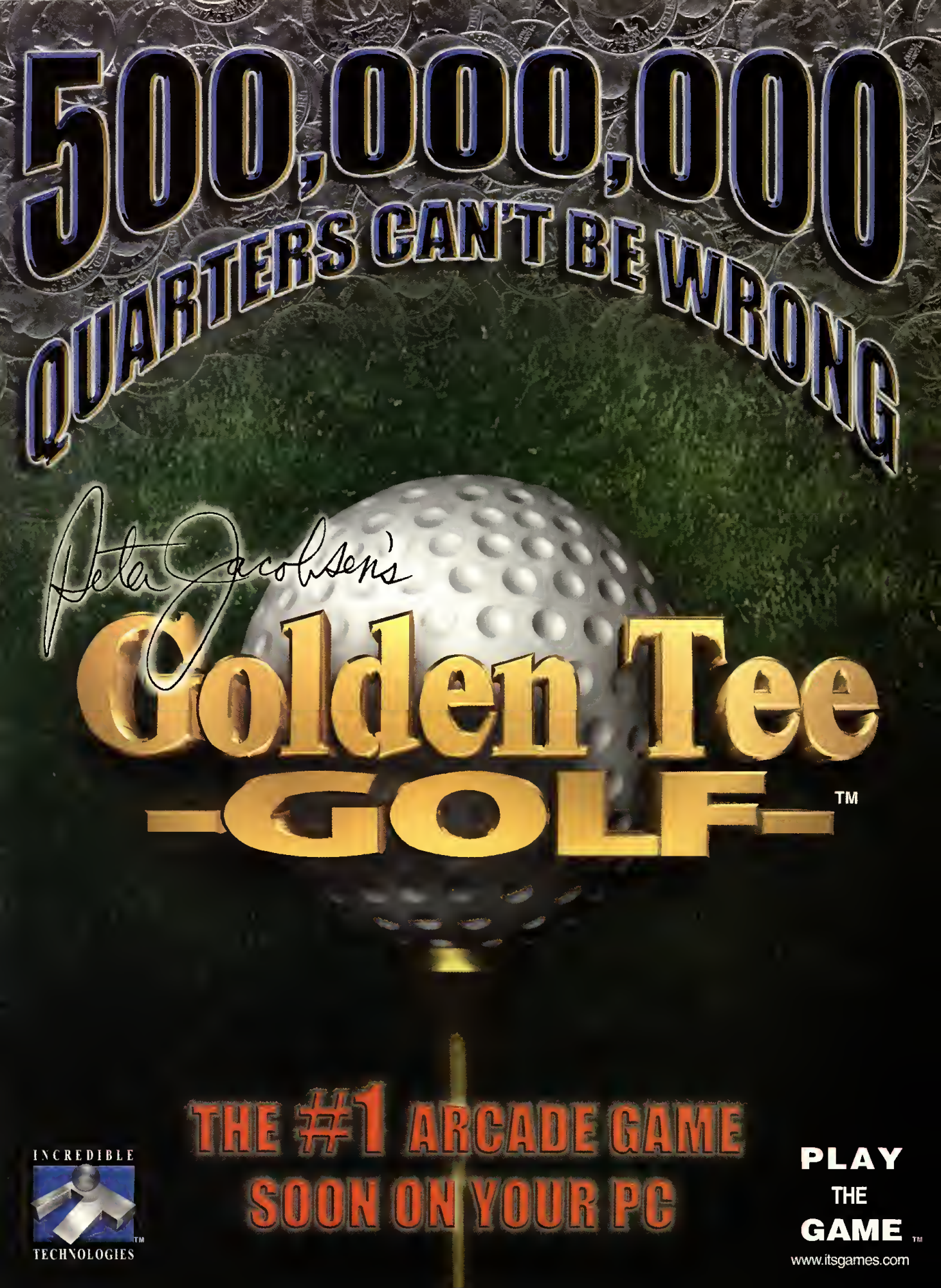
Support for colored lighting is *MOTS*' most noticeable technical advance, and its 14 single-player levels nearly equal *JK*'s oeuvre. Five new Force Powers including Saber Throw, four new weapons like a carbonite freeze gun, and two dozen enemies including the scary Rancor are part of the mix. For multiplayer aficionados, 15 new multiplayer levels and three new "skins" are included. The gameplay has been enhanced with improved AI, featuring new allies in the form of Rebel soldiers who fight alongside the player, and a more event-driven structure, which gives the missions a much greater sense of urgency and drives the game forward with a tension the original sometimes lacked.

Which doesn't mean everything's perfect. The level designs do seem a bit rushed, not showing as much of the architectural splendor that made *JK* so remarkable (most of the corridors are simple, squared-off, straight affairs). A bit more time could have been devoted to play testing as well, since there are odd dead ends.

However, on the whole, *MOTS* gives notice to expansion pack designers everywhere. It is possible to create an exceptional gaming experience within the creative possibilities of an add-on. The foundation has already been laid.

Rating: ★★★★

While the single-player level design could have used a bit more creativity, *Mysteries of the Sith* still packs in enough good stuff to make it shine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Playing through the game is nearly as bad. The player interface is poorly laid out and does not lend itself to a first-person style of play. Level layout is done "hub" style, much like the *Hexen* series. You receive a mission, go complete it, and then return to get another assignment and access to more levels. There is nothing new here and it shows. More than once, *Descent to Undermountain* feels more like a bad *Doom* clone than a role-playing game.

Although the game is lacking in many areas, it does have one shining point — this is possibly the best treatment of the *Forgotten Realms* universe that has ever made it into a videogame. Everything that AD&D fans know and love about the class/ability system has been included. If the characters can do it in *Forgotten Realms*, they can do it here. Unfortunately, this is the game's only strong point, and it's really just an interface feature. When it comes to graphics and gameplay, most players will end up taking a quick look at this one and then shrugging it aside.

Rating: ★

The *Forgotten Realms* character creation system is *Descent to Undermountain*'s only good point

Journeyman Project 3: Legacy of Time

Publisher: **Broderbund**
Developer: **Presto Studios**

Photo-realistic point-and-click adventure games are like Kryptonite to most gamers, but Broderbund's *Journeyman Project 3: Legacy of Time* manages to avoid the pitfalls of the genre and deliver an enjoyable gaming experience with an interesting story, sharp graphics, and a good use of technology. *Legacy of Time* puts players, as Temporal Agent 5, on the track of fugitive Agent 3, who has fled to the past. To prevent the destruction of the temporal stream, gamers must find her and stop her.

The game takes place in three destroyed cities: El Dorado, Shangri La, and Atlantis. Hackneyed? Maybe, but despite the number of previous works of fiction that have used those locales, they remain fascinating. The actual gameplay is quite innovative. It enables players (via their "chameleon suit") to take the roles of NPCs they have previously met — which creates interesting character interaction and puzzle possibilities. Too bad so many of the actors are terrible.

On the control side, *Legacy of Time* is a point-and-click, FMV adventure created entirely of VR nodes. At every step in the game, players can examine the gorgeously rendered surroundings in all 360 degrees. While the graphics aren't quite as detailed as many photo-realistic adventures, the freedom of rotation makes up for it. Unfortunately, like in so many graphic adventures, one often ends up playing "hunt the pixel" when searching for important objects or room exits.

If you're tired of games with tired, trite new age/fantasy plots (*Riven* et all), this game, with a trite science fiction plot, may offer some relief. Although there are a couple of rough spots, Presto has again managed to move forward the graphic adventure to a new level. (Note: This is also available on Macintosh.)

Rating: ★★★★

Players can view the photo-realistic world of *Journeyman 3: Legacy of Time* in all 360 degrees

Online

NetWAR

Publisher: **Headland Digital Media**
Developer: **Semi Logic**

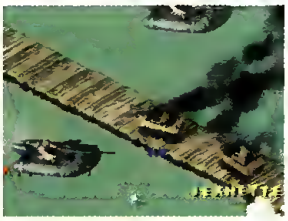
NetWAR is an excellent attempt at an Internet action game that is, unfortunately, hurt as much by its multiplayer requirement as it is helped by it. At its core, *NetWAR*, much like *Sole Survivor*, tries to make the player a single warrior on a large battlefield with dozens of players. Luckily, developer Semi Logic wisely chose to give the player directional control of each character so that it plays out as an action game. Lag is barely visible with even moderate pings, and the action is fast and exciting.

There is a choice of four characters to control, all with their own weapons and attributes, with open spaces for at least four more (although whether this means secret characters or perhaps new add-ons is unclear — the references provided make no mention). Players have free reign of the battlefields and must attempt to find "resource flags," which then can be used to purchase different vehicles to aid in the fight. The addition of different power-ups and weapons ensures plenty of variety and lots of action.

The real wet blanket is in the interface and getting games started. *NetWAR* has the clunkiest game start interface ever used by an online-only game. Before a game can start, a certain number of players has to enter the arena, so what generally happens is a player logs on and waits for enough other players to join. And waits. And waits. This number cannot be changed, and there's no way to start the game manually. This means that for a deathmatch or team game (by far the best modes of play), perspective players may have to sit there, twiddling their collective thumbs for an excess of a half-hour, hoping the game will start. To make matters worse, players aren't allowed to chat while they're waiting — a grievous sin in this day and age, especially when chatting in-game is so easy.

The retail version of the game is a great deal, especially with the included strategy guide, the ten dollar rebate, and the one year of free play. *NetWAR* has most of the right parts in place to be a fun, multiplayer-only, online game, and it's priced to sell. Now all that's needed is an overhaul of the front end so it doesn't take three times as long to start a game as it does to play one.

Rating: ★★★



When multiple players all pilot high-powered vehicles, *NetWAR*'s carnage is tough to beat

Command & Conquer: Sole Survivor

Publisher: **Virgin**
Developer: **Westwood Studios**

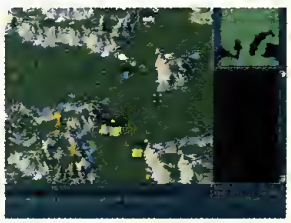
In the absence of a real sequel to its blistering hot *Command & Conquer* license, Westwood offered up *Sole Survivor* as an online-only variant with which *C&C* junkies could get their fix. Let this be a lesson to everybody involved. Minimizing a current hot game and making it online-only doesn't necessarily make it fun. In this case, it's almost anti-fun.

In *Sole Survivor*, players control a single troop, chosen from the original types found in the original *C&C*, and step (or roll) out onto a virtual battlefield shared by up to 50 other players. Graphics are the standard high-res *C&C* fare, and the sounds are traditional, although unspectacular to veterans of the series. There are quite a few gameplay variants, from football to capture the flag to the all-out 50-player deathmatch, and while many of these seem as if they're fun on paper, let us assure you they're all little more than grating exercises in tedium.

However, the real flaw in the game is the simple fact that a player only controls one unit. Imagine taking part in an online baseball game where you play as one player — only you're stuck in left field for nine innings. Now, imagine everyone else on the team is also in left field with you, and you begin to get the idea. Worse, the standard *C&C* control scheme, in which players click on a unit, then click on whom it should attack or where it should go, becomes mindlessly inane when there's only one unit to keep track of, detaching the player from any real feeling of action. Sure, it's possible to run around, picking up power-ups, turning a Nod cycle into the ultimate weapon, but odds are you won't survive too long and really won't care. Pointing and clicking around an environment gets very boring, very fast, and even the inclusion of cool new vehicles and other toys, like dinosaurs, only extends the novelty value of this game a minute or two.

Don't be fooled by the unlimited free play that comes with the retail version. Odds are that even at its low price, you won't get your money's worth before tiring of the game and picking up *Red Alert* again. The best part of the package is the free inclusion of the new Westwood chat — and that's truly sad.

Rating: ★



There may be a lot of people playing *Sole Survivor*, but that doesn't mean they're having fun

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letters

Letters, like Mom used to write

It's always flattering to be mentioned in the always accurate **Next Gen**, but for the record, I'd like to modify Steve Kent's assertion that Tom Zito created *Night Trap* and *Sewer Shark*. I certainly ran the company that produced the games and signed all the checks, but I was hardly the creative guy: Those honors primarily go to Jim Riley, Rob Fulop, and Terry McDonell on *Night Trap* and to Fulop, Ken Melville, and Charlie Kellner on *Sewer Shark*. Videogame trivia fans should note that Don Burgess, who shot *Night Trap*, was the cinematographer on *Forrest Gump*.

Tom Zito
Founder
Digital Pictures

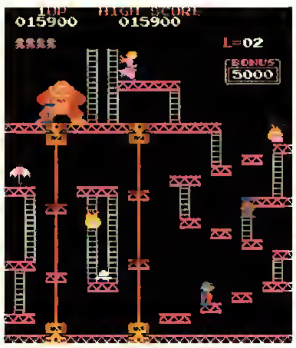
Duly noted. Good to hear from you, Tom.

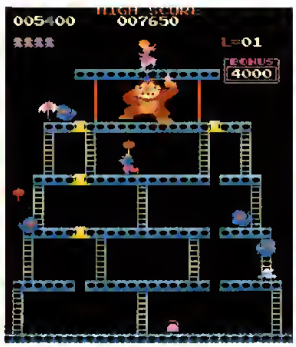
As I was going through my pointless life, I've seen one thing change in **NG** in the last few months. What happened to the covers? They used to be made out of that . . . well, I don't know what it was, but it was the only reason I bought your mag! (Well, maybe there were a few more.) Now it's just hard paper. Even *GamePro*'s cover is better than that. So, please, I beg of you, bring back that old stuff you used to make the covers with.

Merlin
Merlin744@aol.com

As many readers have been kind enough to point out, **NG 39** was not laminated as it usually is. Over the last six months or so, **Next Generation** has been experimenting with different kinds of cover treatments, from the die-cuts in **NG 35** to the dual cover of **NG 37** to an attempt at a process known as "spot varnish" for **NG 39**. In order to work, the cover could not be laminated, or the varnish wouldn't show (the same reason the "America's Elite" version of **NG 37** wasn't laminated either — the metallic ink wouldn't show).

Unfortunately, due to a printer error, a glossy stock was used instead of the heavier matte finish stock we were supposed to have. The result: The varnish failed to stand out against the gloss, and it wound up looking thin and cheap instead of eye-catching. (However, if you hold the cover up and catch the light just right, it's still possible to make out the edge of the varnish around our logo. Really.) Sorry.





There's more than one version of the original *Donkey Kong*, but not every version was created equal. More were than we thought, though

I really enjoy the little tidbits that you include throughout your magazine. My letter is regarding the Datastream on page 17 of your March issue. I guess I'm kind of a nostalgic person, and *Donkey Kong* was my favorite game. I own most of the versions listed, including a couple not listed. Adam was not the only version that had all four levels. Every version (that I'm familiar with) by Atarisoft and a couple by Ocean (C-64 and Amstrad CPC) included all four levels and most of the intermissions. Even the Vic20 version had all levels and intermissions crammed into 5K. Pretty impressive, considering Coleco couldn't squeeze that out of its "glitchy" 16K to 32K Colecovision cart. As for the Atari 2600 and 7800 versions, they were both programmed by Coleco. As for Nintendo, there is no excuse as to why the Nintendo version was lacking most of what made the game so great (not to mention how they butchered *DK Jr.* and *Mario Bros.* too!) Atari may be nothing but a memory of how not to do things in business, but it did have a lot of talent at one time that deserves to be remembered too!

Darryl Guenther
Turbo1970@aol.com

Thanks. There will always be a soft spot in **NG**'s collective heart for the classic Atari.

Question: What does Stuyvesant Village, a sprawling garden apartment complex that lies on the borderline of Irvington and Union, New Jersey, mean to videogame fans? Probably nothing. However, Leonard Herman, author of *Phoenix: The Fall & Rise of Videogames* grew up there, and Keith Feinstein, founder of Videotopia, lived there for a few years. Howard Scott Warshaw, the Atari programmer who put together "Once Upon Atari," never lived there, but his first cousin Richard Friedman (who happened to be a close friend of Leonard Herman) grew up there also.

Sorry to bore you with such useless information, but since you mentioned Keith, Howard, and myself in your April issue, I thought I'd share it with you. (BTW, I didn't know Keith when he lived there. We didn't meet until many years later, after the first edition of *Phoenix* was published and he was living in Atlanta getting Videotopia together.)

Thanks again for the mention.

Leonard Herman
Author
Phoenix

Something in the neighborhood water supply, perhaps?

I have a question regarding the cover of **NG 37**. In **NG 39**'s letters section, there is a reprint of the "Girls, girls, girls" cover, which also graced the **NG Online** site for a while. It struck me as odd that, while I had read the article on female game characters, I did not recall ever seeing that cover show up in my mailbox.

Retrieving my **NG 37** from the bookshelf, I noticed that it indeed has a different cover than the one publicized — "Special Limited Edition: America's Elite," with a close-cropped photo of Id's John Carmack.

While I have nothing against John, I'm curious as to why two different covers were created for **NG 37**. Have you done this before, and on which issues?

Personally, the Carmack cover strikes me as more appropriate — it's people like him that truly drive

corresponding

the game industry. Did you create the "sexy" cover for newsstands and the "elite" cover for subscribers? If so, I'd say that's pretty ironic, considering the content of the "Girls, girls, girls" article.

As you wrote, "Things have changed since Lara Croft made her debut — now these 'dream girls' are popping up all over the place. But is it just a cheap way to sell games?"

... or a cheap way to sell videogame magazines?

Patrick Moynihan
patrick@zombie.com

"Cheap," yes, but not the way you're thinking. The "America's Elite" version was meant as a limited edition treatment, featuring a glossier stock than usual, with a metallic ink — pricey stuff — and that was only sent to subscribers and EB stores.

Otherwise, yeah, we're busted. Oddly enough, while the "Girls, girls, girls" cover sold very well on most newsstands, "America's Elite" sales were kinda flat at EB. Go figure ..

I'm a die-hard PSX player, and I need to know when *Blasto* is coming out. I haven't heard anything about it, and I am getting worried. Also, in issue 38 in "Are you a hardcore gamer?" question 35 reads, "You think it was a bad idea for **Next Generation** to give a cover to *Blasto*." Is this one of your impossible questions, or are you being serious? I don't know about other readers, but I have a feeling *Blasto* might be the 1998 game of the year. That is just my personal opinion.

Kurt Samson
kurty15@hotmail.com

Consider yourself docked an additional point.

Really, I have only one question for you — is there a Nude Raider code for the PlayStation version of *Tomb Raider*, and if so, could you please reveal it to me? You don't really need to print this letter in your awesome magazine (which is one of the only ones I read), but if you could, please reply and let me know if there is such a code.

Hellknight69
hellknight69@mailexcite.com

Then consider it replied. There is NO Nude Raider code for PlayStation or any other system (although that didn't stop a couple of editors at one of the other publications here at Imagine from trying that silly pool jump for the better part of a day). There is a crack for the PC version floating around on the Web somewhere that has a nude Lara, but that's totally nonsanctioned by Eidos and Core — in fact, anti-sanctioned might be a better term. Interestingly, it has been rumored that Core "leaked" this whole, patently false idea itself just to drum up sales, but that's pure speculation.

Congratulations on a great feature in **NG 38** — I really enjoyed the hardcore gamer quiz, and I'm proud (I think) to be a "hardcore" gamer. I did, however, notice a mistake: In the "We're a little concerned if ..." section, question 25 reads: "You have memorized and can quote the *Donkey Kong Country* vs *Mortal Kombat* argument from the movie *Billy Madison*." I can and do, but Billy (Adam Sandler) argued for the original *Donkey Kong*, not *DKC*. I gave myself a bonus point.

Daniel S. Pancotto
dapancotto@davidson.edu

And a well-earned one. Our goof. We have deducted a point from ourselves.

Sure, *Metal Gear Solid* is almost absolutely sure to be a terrific game, but why do you keep eating up valuable magazine space every time you get a small morsel of info? You don't have to have an entire section devoted to a single game each month. The only exception to this rule would be info on upcoming consoles and hardware, which are the major purchasing decisions of gamers and therefore need more attention than a single game for an aging console. Many readers, like myself, get tired of reading the same previews each month. Anyhow, I believe your mag to be the most informative, entertaining, and mature in the industry.

TheHarveyGuy
TheHarveyGuy@usa.net

Another one of the changes we're experimenting with at **Next Generation** is in the timeliness of coverage we give to games. While we have always strived to inform our readers about new titles as early as possible and will continue to do so, we found we were often ignoring certain important titles around the time they shipped, or as the marketing blitz began, simply because we had "already covered it." To us, this seemed to rob our readers of information at a time when they would be most interested in it.

So, we've shifted our thinking a bit. Now, with certain important games, we're going to offer simply the most complete coverage possible at the time when reader interest is high. This was the thinking behind *Metal Gear* (although Konami pushed back the release at the 11th hour) — condense everything already known, cover what's new, go over the history of the series, and interview the developers. We're sorry if this leaves some readers feeling as if we are running it into the ground, but we don't think everyone will feel this way. Write us, and let us know what you think.

As a former magazine writer myself, I well understand the need to impose boundaries on the scope of an article to focus on its main thrust. While your article, "How to get a job in the game industry" (March 1998) presented its principle premise well, your editors did many of us a great disservice adding the tossaway line, "Try not to take a detour to customer support — that's usually a dead end."

At Activision, over the past year alone, our customer support department (with a standing staff of

If we'd known the printer would use the wrong cover stock for NG 39, we never would have tried the varnish

13), saw two people move to our corporate MIS group, two people move to quality assurance, one person move to a production coordinator position (our entry level production position), and another staffer currently is transitioning to our video department. That's 46% of the customer support group that found career path movement within Activision. I find it hard to believe that Activision is unique in identifying and grooming talent from its customer support group.

Incidentally, the correct address for contacting Activision HR should be: Page Morris, Activision, 3100 Ocean Park Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90405.

Jim Summers
Director, Quality Assurance & Customer Support
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Certainly, we've heard of and know people who were able to move out of customer service, and no foot in the door is a bad foot in the door. However, while researching the article, the strongest impression left with us by the dozens of professionals we spoke to was, "Stay out of customer service if you want to end up in design." If your aim is PR, marketing, or a few other areas, it might be a decent stepping stone, but for anyone who wants to some day make games for a living, it's not a good place to start.

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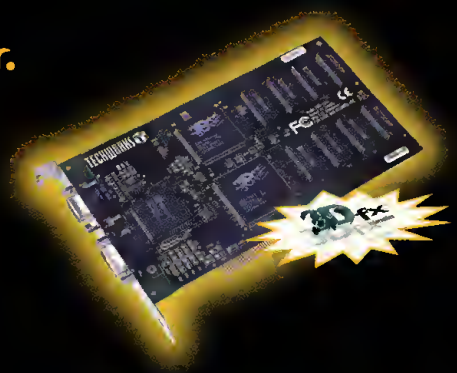

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